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A TALE OF THE

Women's Suffrage Movement.

BY

MISS RAMSAY.

LONDON:
CHARLES J. SKEET, 10, KING WILLIAM STREET,
CHARING CROSS.
1874.

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TO

THE LADY ANNA GORE LANGTON,

TO WHOSE GENEROUS EFFORTS

THE WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE MOVEMENT

OWES SO MUCH,

THIS TALE

Is respectfully Dedicated

By the AUTHOR.

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MILDRED'S CAREER.

CHAPTER I.

NEW WINE IN OLD BOTTLES.

SHADDON is a newly-enfranchised borough. When it was advanced to that dignity from being a simple parish and township certain of the inhabitants declared that they did not see what would be the advantage of the change. They had done very well without returning a member to Parliament. On the eve of the first election, when an unwonted excitement prevailed, and politics became the topic of the day, to the exclusion of all the ordinary subjects of conversation, it is reported that some persons, we shall not be so invidious as to specify the sex, went so far as to pronounce that the place would no longer be worth living in.

We quote these opinions to save our readers and ourselves some trouble, as they convey an impression of the tone of the place as well or better than pages of description.

The dismal foreboding of the evils to follow the gift of the franchise proved however groundless. The dreaded election passed over very quietly, the Conservative candidate was returned without opposition, and Shaddon quickly fell back into its old grooves, nor had there since been another election to disturb its normal tranquillity.

A pleasant place, in its way, was Shaddon—(we refer to about ten years ago)—where any one, overwrought by the hurry and excitement of life, might spend a little time very happily, to rest and recruit.

There was good trout fishing in that clear stream which, now winding through green fields, now sparkling over stones, had the effect of a bright eye in the landscape. The air was very fine; it could not be otherwise, blowing over such scented meadows.

Scattered here and there were a few gentlemen's residences, more or less pretentious in appearance, and it is to one of these that we would draw your attention.

The house was something between a cottage and a villa, and on the evening in question the drawing-room was set out as for a festive occasion. The embroidery on chairs and cushions was all uncovered, the vases were freshly dressed with evergreens, and such pale flowers

as the winter season afforded; on the tables were distributed photograph books and nick-nacks, while all shabbily-bound volumes, traces of useful needlework, and superfluous newspapers had been carefully put out of sight. A neatly-folded copy of the "Laggard" was alone suffered to remain. In a word, the Miss Randalls had a tea-party.

It was in a sense a representative party. Not representative of talent, learning, or any particular shade of political opinion, yet fairly deserving the epithet.

The fact has lately been impressed upon us that in the population of Great Britain there is a formidable preponderance of women over men, nearly a million more women than men statistics inform us. Now this party consisted of seven or eight ladies and one gentleman. It was, therefore, representative of the state of society in our day and country. The one gentleman was the clergyman of the parish.

The ladies of Shaddon affected, as a rule, clerical society, and Mr. Green theirs. He spoke on subjects that interested them; in conversing with him they were in no danger of being disconcerted by the expression of broad advanced views with which they could not sympathise. Besides this, as a bond of union, there were sundry charitable organizations in the

parish, in connection with which the ladies worked with and under him; this was what he liked, and they also, from habit.

This party, then, were seated round the tea-table, which glittered with a good deal of handsome, though rather old-fashioned, plate; the hour being about eight o'clock. Conversation was proceeding with great animation, for a subject had accidentally been started which gave rise to quite a spirited debate. The question was Women's Rights.

It happened that in a pause following a discussion on church music and the Christmas decorations, one of the ladies mentioned that a person had that afternoon called at her house with a printed form of petition (addressed to the Honourable the Commons of Great Britain and Ireland, in Parliament assembled), to which she was requested to affix her signature, the object being to obtain for women the right of voting for members of the legislature.

"And I was told," added the speaker, "that it is to be taken to every house in Shaddon. Whether the canvasser is a paid agent or not I do not know, but he has something to do with a Miss Althea Warburton."

"Ah, most likely, Miss Althea Warburton!" repeated the clergyman, in a tone of languid disapproval,

"Do you know her?" asked several ladies in chorus.

"Not I, I am thankful to say; but I have seen her name once or twice. She was cut up in the "Laggard." She is a woman who has completely stepped out of her sphere. Why! she has addressed a public audience from a platform!"

"Then you think we ought not to sign this petition, or whatever they call it?"

"I only know," was the sufficiently intelligible answer, "that, if it is brought to my house, it will come no farther than the door."

The ladies would probably have endorsed the opinion of Mr. Green, whatever it had been, as such was his animus with regard to the movement in question, they were satisfied that it must be something to be stamped out. So they expressed their hearty concurrence with his view.

"They want votes, indeed! Not they. What had women to do with politics?"

One dissentient voice alone was raised. A black-eyed girl, on whose broad forehead was written the capability, at all events, of independent thought, ventured to observe that she thought, as women were obliged to pay taxes, they ought to have votes, and she wished the ladies of Shaddon would sign this petition.

"I think, my dear Miss Mildred," observed the clergyman, in a tone of mild rebuke, "you can hardly be considering what you are saying. Study the epistles of St. Paul, and refresh your memory as to what he says regarding the sphere and the duties of women."

"I am not aware that Paul says anything about women voting, or men either, for the matter of that," said Miss Mildred, averting her eyes from the direction of the tea-maker, so as not to see the slight frown with which her elder sister sought to check her; "and even if he did, rules that may have been reasonable enough in his day, under totally different social conditions, can hardly have much application to us."

These heterodox sentiments caused all eyes to be directed towards Mildred, and most of the ladies were pleased that the clergyman took upon himself to administer the needful reproof.

"I am shocked and grieved, Miss Mildred, to hear you express such dangerous, I may say profane opinions. Where you acquired them I cannot imagine; not from your sisters, I am sure. Of course," and the tone grew severe, "what St. Paul says applies to the absurd and wicked claim which a few misguided women are making to political power. And it is equally obvious that the rules he lays down must be as applicable in our state of society as to his own."

There was a gentle murmur of applause, and Miss Randall, a placid-looking lady of uncertain age, whose becoming half mourning was worn in memory of an officer to whom she had been engaged ten or twelve years before, and who had fallen in the Crimea, observed—

"I am very glad to hear you speak so, Mr. Green, and I wish you would give poor Mildred a few words of good advice on another subject. She wanted the secretary of our book club—of course the request was not complied with—to order that dreadful work of Bishop Colenso's."

"Worse and worse," said the clergyman, shaking his head. "You are on very dangerous ground, Miss Mildred."

Mildred's colour rose; she seemed aware that she had enlisted on the losing side of the argument, and that she was looked upon as a black sheep by all present. But she gathered up her courage, and remarked that if it is ever a duty to look on both sides of a question, it must be as much so on religion as on any other subject.

"Of course we look on both sides," he replied testily. "But that is our duty, not yours. Your part is to receive with meekness the spiritual food provided for you by the Church to which it is your privilege to belong. And never, I earnestly warn you, open such books as those of Bishop Colenso."

"For fear, do you mean," said Mildred, with a quietness of tone which made it difficult to pronounce whether she spoke in simplicity or sarcasm, "that I find some of the things I have been taught to believe are not true?"

"Heaven forbid!" exclaimed the clergyman with a shudder, helping himself, as he spoke, to a piece of buttered cake; "but if you once begin to look presumptuously on both sides, as you say, there is no knowing where you may end. You may even end in becoming a Dissenter!"

"And a Radical!" added a lady, portentously, "if you go in for such revolutionary measures as women's suffrage."

The door was thrown open, and Mr. Hotham announced.

"I am sorry to be so late, Miss Randall," said the new comer, addressing the lady of the house, "but I left home as soon after dinner as I could."

"It is very good of you to look in upon us at all," answered his hostess, graciously; for Mr. Hotham, who represented the legal profession in Shaddon, was suspected of not appreciating tea parties.

"Do not let me cause any interruption," said he; "no cake, thank you. You seemed to be in the midst of some interesting conversation."

"We must have Mr. Hotham's opinion," ex-

claimed one of the ladies. "We were speaking of women's rights. What do you think on that question?"

"No one can think more highly of their rights than I do," answered he, chivalrously.

"Ah, but you may not be prepared to concede all that some ladies are asking nowadays. Do you think we ought to have votes?"

"That question requires consideration," said he, with the air of a man accustomed to weigh his opinions. "I have never yet thought about it. I am inclined, however, to believe that women have so many rights, or privileges, already, that votes are unnecessary."

"There, Miss Mildred Randall," triumphantly, "what do you strong-minded ladies say to that?"

"For heaven's sake, Miss ——, do not class Mildred with the strong-minded ladies," exclaimed Mildred's two sisters, in horror.

"Are you one of the strong-minded women, Miss Mildred?" said Mr. Hotham, with a bantering smile. "I am sure that is a vile aspersion. You may prosecute for libel."

Again the bright carnation rose in Mildred's cheek, but she answered steadily, "I wish I were worthy of being classed with them, but I know I am not. I only admire and respect them."

"Keep your opinions to yourself then, I advise you," said he laughingly, "or you may chance to lose an admirer."

"I have no admirer to lose," retorted Mildred, tossing back her head, "and if I had—"

The rest of the sentence was lost, for her eldest sister, who looked considerably annoyed, by a determined effort changed the conversation.

"Have you heard from your son lately, Mr. Hotham?"

"Yes," said he, as he stood beside her stirring his tea, "Frank is getting on capitally; I begin to think there is more in the fellow than I used to suppose."

"That sounds disparaging of Mr. Frank. What do you mean?"

"Oh, nothing worse than that I used to think he laughed too much to be very solid."

A change came over Mildred's face—a change which softened and embellished it—as she overheard these remarks. Shakespeare says, "What's in a name?" The name of Frank Hotham had power to banish from her mind, for the moment at least, all interest in women's rights, petitions, and parliamentary votes. With a look of painful consciousness on her features, she sat out the remainder of the meal a morbid, abstracted girl.

A move from the tea-table caused a diversion, and for the rest of the evening innocuous games of bézique, just come into fashion, and music, indifferent in quality, provided entertainment more to the taste of the company than discussions on women's political rights.

As regards the latter, we need only further say, that at the end of the evening, when the guests had departed, as Miss Randall stood by the fire watching her maid extinguish the superfluous gas, she suddenly observed—

"Martha, it is possible that a paper—a petition they call it—may be brought to this house. I don't exactly know what it is about—to make women members of Parliament, I think. Do not take it in. Say we do not approve of the object, and wish to have nothing whatever to do with it."

And a similar fate awaited the petition in nearly every house in Shaddon. The clergy denounced the movement as unscriptural, and the attempt to procure signatures was in consequence a failure. No names were obtained except a few from petty shopkeepers and cottagers, whose very hand-writing betrayed the class to which they belonged.

CHAPTER II.

THE BEAUTY OF SHADDON.

"THE daughters will be very badly off when the parents die," is a remark one often hears. Were it less common we should think more of the state of things it represents.

"She had no fortune," we are informed of some well-provided-for married lady, surrounded by comfort and luxury. Well, her husband is rich, and it does not signify whether the means were originally his or hers. But supposing that whether by her own choice or otherwise, she had happened not to marry, what would have become of her then? She might have recruited the ranks of incompetent governesses, equally to her own discomfort, and the disadvantage of the children committed to her care. Or if she belonged by birth to a higher grade, to which teaching is not a natural resource, she would probably, after spending a few years in humiliating dependence on relations, have dropped gradually into obscurity, and her former friends would have been unable to pronounce how she managed.

We happened once to glance over the report of a society that professes to assist indigent gentlewomen. It stated that a certain number

of ladies had received gratuities of five or ten pounds per annum. Now what must be the daily privations of women whose pecuniary resources are so small that five or ten pounds is an appreciable addition to their income, sufficient to induce them to undergo the humiliation of becoming recipients of charity?

Mrs. Hazlitt, a widow lady, well born and well connected, had many an anxious thought for the future of her own only daughter; for her jointure, though it enabled her to live in comfort with economy, and to give her child a good education, did not allow her to save much.

Her hope of course was that Leonora would marry, and as that young lady was by general consent pronounced the beauty of Shaddon, her mother reckoned pretty securely on her being thus well and early provided for, even in these degenerate days. Mrs. Hazlitt, poor woman, was a very conventional mother, in this respect. She did not deny that she wished to get her daughter married. It was for this end that she cultivated those talents which produce effect in society, straining her means to procure first-rate masters for music and languages. She made a great point of grace of carriage and manner, and was very particular about the acquaintances she formed. Nor, as things are, can one blame her for the course she pursued. If the ideal of mar-

riage is something far different from this—if it is degrading a girl to train her to please in society, with a view to what is called an establishment—the root of the mischief must be sought elsewhere than in the anxious solicitude of a mother who knows that her daughter's only alternative is marriage or beggary.

The object, meanwhile, of these cares, happily untroubled by any concern for her own future, grew up in her country home, fair as a flower, joyous as the birds. Mrs. Hazlitt's house was surrounded by a garden, in which Nora took great delight. But better even than the garden she loved the orchard behind the house, for that was the scene of her almost daily meeting with her young neighbour and favourite friend, Mildred Randall.

People laugh at girls' friendships, but who in after-years does not look back with something of envious regret to their own first friendships, "when life is yet an untold tale, when the mirage is so bright, hope and energy so strong!" Nora and Mildred were very fond of each other in those days. They used to stroll amongst the trees of the orchard, with their arms twined round each other, after the fashion of girls, talking—of what did they not talk? Yes, there were things unspoken of between them because unthought of. They never spoke of the pos-

sibility of either selling herself in a loveless marriage, or of a distant day when life might be, in their case, little better than a dreary blank, void alike of object and interest.

As they advanced in their teens, marriage was occasionally the theme of their conversation, for in the dreams of Mildred, at least, love early began to play a part; from the day when she first suspected that it could not be a purely accidental coincidence that young Frank Hotham when at home from Cambridge always happened to have business that took him in the direction of her walks. Mildred used to blush when he was mentioned, and endowed him with all those ideal perfections with which a romantic girl invests the hero of her imagination.

Leonora, on the contrary, whether from an instinctive knowledge that she was brought up for the marriage market, which roused her to revolt, had rather a distaste to the idea of yielding up her maiden freedom; when Mildred spoke of her own lover, and pressed for confidence in return, she would say—

"I cannot see why all girls should marry. A single life may be just as happy, and is more independent. I don't want to marry, unless"—as a saving clause—"I meet with some one whom I like *very* much, which I do not expect."

Such confidences under the apple-trees were

often brought to an abrupt termination by a call from Mrs. Hazlitt, "Nora, come in, the sun will spoil your complexion."

When Nora was seventeen, her mother spared no expense to dress her well, and let her be seen in the best society of the county. She showed taste by dressing her, especially in an evening, with great simplicity. White tarletan, with some decorations of white satin ribbon, and a wreath of flowering myrtle on her hair, was the dress she came out in. It suited her young, fresh beauty, her classic profile, the purity of her complexion, and her lithe rounded figure. Mrs. Hazlitt's handiwork (the forming of her daughter to please and take in the world) could not have been more successful. Leonora's manner was not very frank, but it was gentle and self-possessed. Her every movement was grace yet also full of elasticity, for Nora enjoyed dancing for its own sake, and her dark eyes sparkled in a ball-room with very real and girlish happiness.

"What a charming-looking girl Miss Hazlitt is," a lady remarked at a county ball, as she watched Leonora, who was dancing with Mr. Herne, the member for Shaddon.

"Yes, Herne has shown his taste. He will have a wife who will do him credit."

"A wife! Is there any likelihood?"

"It is arranged, and no secret. He gave out in our smoking-room to-day that he is going to marry her."

The pair thus referred to presented a great contrast in appearance. There are men whose age it is difficult, at a first glance, to guess. Mr. Herne was not much past thirty, but he might have been taken for ten, or even twenty years older. Men of that stamp seem to stand still as regards age. Having nothing of youthfulness to lose, they look much the same at forty as at thirty. His figure was shabby, his features less positively bad than insignificant, and seemed to indicate a character of the same stamp. One could not easily believe that man capable of generous actions, liberal or enlarged thought. His manners, notwithstanding, were those of a man accustomed all his life to good society. His education had been begun at Eton, and finished at Cambridge. He had succeeded on his majority to a large property, and, within rather narrow limits, his intellect was acute.

The dance being over, he led his partner to her maternal chaperon, who, though receiving personally no attention, sat against the wall, perfectly placid and contented. She was doing her duty, and reaping her reward.

Nora greeted her mother with a pleasant smile,

and sat down beside her for five minutes, when another partner carried her away.

Mr. Herne, at the same time, went up to the lady whose remark has been recorded.

"I never saw you dance before, I think, Mr. Herne," she observed.

"Very likely; I," in explanation, "have made up my mind to marry."

"So I have already been informed, and I congratulate you sincerely; Miss Hazlitt is a sweet and lovely girl; I have the pleasure of a slight acquaintance with her. I suppose I may offer her my good wishes?"

"On no account, at present. I—in truth, I have not yet proposed."

"O——oh."

As Nora was leaving the ball-room, Mr. Herne pressed forward to offer his arm. As he took her downstairs, he whispered a few words.

A deep, though not in the least a conscious blush, embarrassment in the dark eyes, and a hurried, "Oh, please don't speak so—I could not—indeed—you are very good—but, no. I could not think of such a thing."

The following day a letter was received by Mrs. Hazlitt, informing her (she already knew) of his proposal to her daughter. As Miss Hazlitt was, he was aware, very young, she had probably not known her own mind the previous

evening. He had, perhaps, spoken abruptly, and, in short, the object of his letter was to ask her mother's intervention in his favour.

This event occasioned a difference of opinion between the mother and daughter. Nora knew her own mind perfectly. He was not a man to prove attractive to a young girl, and she would unhesitatingly have repeated her refusal. Very different were her mother's views. What did it signify that he was shabby in appearance, dry and uninteresting in manner, not a man to be in love with? He would ensure her daughter a home and position. He had the reputation of being a respectable man, as men of the world go, and Mrs. Hazlitt spoke in his favour very urgently. The arguments she used were those which had long existed in her own mind.

"Nora, when I die, you will be very badly off."

To which Leonora replied lightly, "You are not going to die, mamma, dear."

"Well, but, Nora, it is necessary to look things in the face. You will have so very little."

"If I have nothing to live upon I can be a governess," responded Leonora, cheerfully; and she did not feel that she would shrink at all from such necessity. For in most healthily-constituted young girls, there is a latent spark of energy which, however it may be repressed and

stifled by the conventional system of feminine training, leads them, at some period or other of their youth, to desire to be up and doing, to carve out their own fortunes. Mrs. Hazlitt, however, knowing more of the world, answered in a grave matter-of-fact tone.

Marriage, she represented, was a woman's natural vocation, and in Nora's case, it was the only road to ease and comfort. In short, it would be very foolish to reject Mr. Herne's offer.

Nora, at last, grew a little petulant, and declared that, at any rate, she would rather take her chance than marry the first man who asked her, when she did not like him.

So Mr. Herne's proposal, greatly to his astonishment, was declined with thanks, and Mildred congratulated her friend on her decision.

"It might be very nice to marry your real lover one of these days"—Frank was in her thoughts as she spoke—"but as for marrying just for the sake of being married, why it was a vulgar idea, fit only for servant-maids."

A year brought great changes. Mrs. Hazlitt died in the interval, and Leonora tasted the bitterness of the bread of dependence. She almost made up her mind to go out as a governess, but the resolution was then taken with a full understanding of the sacrifice involved. Loss of social position, drudgery for but the

smallest pittance of remuneration. At this juncture, she again encountered Mr. Herne. His proposal was renewed, and was accepted by her, with feelings, if not of affection for him, at least, sufficiently grateful to determine her to prove, in every sense, a good wife.

It was remarked by a friend, who criticized this narrative while in progress, that Mr. Herne evinced, at all events, some disinterestedness and constancy. Undoubtedly he desired to obtain Leonora as his wife. He admired her young stately beauty, and her style of manner pleased him. But there was not, necessarily, any more disinterestedness in his overlooking her want of fortune, and persevering in his suit, than in the man who takes a fancy to an estate or a house, and is willing to pay handsomely to procure it.

The wedding was celebrated with all the adjuncts of déjeûner, orange blossoms, and a train of bridesmaids, from the house of one of Leonora's wealthy relations, most of whom, though they had fought very shy of the orphan dependent girl, treated her with marked cordiality so soon as she was about to make a "good" marriage.

The day before the ceremony, she went out for a solitary walk, wishing to bid farewell to one or two poor people in whom she had taken an interest. As she approached one of the cottages,

she perceived symptoms of a rustic courtship between a young man in working clothes and a rosy, comely girl. The man was speaking earnestly, persuasively; the girl's reply was, "I have given you my answer, Tom, and I shan't change." As Nora came in sight, she hastily left her wooer, and ran behind the cottage.

Nora sat some time within, speaking in a friendly way with the mother. Presently, she observed, "I suspect that I interrupted Susan and her lover as I came in. Taylor, the carpenter, was talking to her in the garden."

"Oh, Susan won't care, miss," was the reply; "she'll just as lieve, I dare say, that you did frighten him away. She has given Tom his answer, but he'll no take it, and keeps on bothering, though she is one as knows her own mind."

"But is it not a pity she should refuse a steady, respectable young man?" suggested Nora. "He must be earning good wages, too."

"Yes, miss, he is steady enough, I believe, and well to do in his trade. Had Sue fancied him I shouldn't have been ill pleased, but she knows best herself."

"You must be annoyed, I should think, to see her throw away a good offer," remarked Leonora thoughtfully.

"Why, for the matter of that, miss, my girl can always support herself," was the reply. "If

she does not marry, she has her trade of straw-plaiting to fall back upon, or she can go into service. Anyhow, she is independent. If she meets with a man she can like, well and good; if she remains single, why well and good too. Marriage is no case of Hobson's choice, as you may say, with her."

This remark had a significance which the speaker little guessed. It supplied Leonora with food for meditation as she walked home.

"Is it not Hobson's choice with me?" she thought. "How much better off is that cottage girl than I am? She is not driven to marry because no other career is open to her. But surely there is something wrong in the state of society where a woman, because she is born a lady, can be driven to choose between a loveless marriage and life-long poverty!"

Such were the reflections of the Beauty of Shaddon on her bridal eve.

CHAPTER III.

VEGETABLE LIVES.

THE Miss Randalls possessed three thousand pounds a piece, which money, invested for the most part in railway shares, at a high interest,

gave them a joint income of about five hundred a year. Their father had been a country gentleman, but his estate was settled on heirs male, and, at his death, a very distant relative came into possession.

The daughters, therefore, of the late proprietor had been called upon to quit the home round which all their early associations clustered, and saw it pass into the hands of a stranger. That their case was one of any hardship no one thought of saying; it was but in accordance with a very prevalent law of entail—a law made, assuredly, not by women; but, being made by men, was, of course, like all other laws, made with a view to their own benefit. The Miss Randalls, it would have been said, had no right to complain; many ladies were in the same situation; and black and black, as we all know, if only in sufficient quantity, makes white.

At the time of their father's death, the two grown-up daughters were handsome young women, but from that day their position became entirely and sadly changed. They decided to remain in the neighbourhood, for they judiciously observed—"Here it is known who we are; elsewhere we should be only three Miss Randalls who live in a small house." Practically, however, as regards society, it did not much signify where they lived. Having no longer a carriage,

they had difficulty in returning the calls of people at a distance. They were forced, therefore, to be satisfied with the few acquaintances within reach. Miss Randall, as head of the small establishment, seemed to take at once the position of a middle-aged woman, so their lives droned on.

The family originally consisted of sons as well as of daughters. The eldest son, had he lived, would have inherited the landed property; the others received education to enable them to make their own way in the world.

"I have not much to leave you," Mr. Randall said to his younger sons, "but every profession is open to you. If you have ability or pluck you will get on. After all, you may be, in the end, as well off as your elder brother."

So the young Randalls of the masculine gender were sent, in the first place, to good schools, and finished off respectively at an English or one of the foreign universities. Thus they were furnished with the most efficient arms to go forth to the battle of life.

Their sisters, meanwhile, were provided with no such arms to encounter any contingencies that might occur. They were brought up—educated is scarcely an appropriate term—at home, under a governess, who, being required to unite in her own person a knowledge of all

the subjects that her pupils were supposed to study, could hardly be very efficient in any. To descend to particulars. The Miss Randalls were taught music, whether they had a taste for it or not. Or rather, we should say, they were taught to play and sing, for the theory of music, thorough bass, they were not taught. They professed to know French; how far they knew it, it might be dangerous to investigate. They had such a knowledge of general history as consists chiefly in the recollection of certain dates and events, and they had considerable acquaintance with what is called light literature—poetry and popular fiction. They wrote pretty hands, spelt correctly, or nearly so; expressed themselves grammatically, from habit rather than from any clear comprehension of the rules of syntax; and would have considered themselves disgraced by any egregious blunder in geography. In arithmetic they were very weak, their governess, being rather so herself, had made no point of it with her pupils.

Death, meanwhile, was busy in the circle; the sons one after another were cut off, until, at the time we take up their story, the family was inadequately represented by three unmarried sisters, living on their railway dividends, in the quiet parish of Shaddon.

By uniting their means, and obtaining a good

interest for their money, they were in the enjoyment of what, under the circumstances, was considered a comfortable independence. The small establishment had that air of order and propriety in all the arrangements which so often distinguishes the ménage of single gentlewomen. The maid-servants were trim, and kept well up to their work. The tea parties, which were the form in which the Miss Randalls usually exercised hospitality (chiefly to other ladies), were on a par with those of their neighbours; and visitors calling in the afternoon never found them otherwise than nicely dressed and engaged in some lady-like occupation, usually fancy-work, to their skill in which the drawing-room, and, in fact, every room in the house, bore abundant testimony.

Such a quantity of embroidery, fine knitting, and crochet as met the eye at every turn! There was the elaborate peacock, mounted and glazed, as a standing screen, with the eyes of the tail worked in floss silk, the chef d'œuvre of Miss Georgina. There was the table-cover, produced on high days and holidays, bordered by how many yards of embroidery in beads and Berlin wool? over which Miss Randall had spent many an industrious hour. Miss Mildred had no masterpiece to show, a deficiency for which her sisters felt sometimes called upon to apologise;

but she had done her share of the antimacassars and mats with which the furniture was liberally besprinkled.

We never see a room in which there is a great display of fancy-work without almost a feeling of sadness. It seems to speak of gray monotonous lives, of long hours of leisure for which no more interesting occupation could be found, of skill which could be turned to no better account. We picture a face bending over the canvas, a patient face, lined with incipient melancholy; not discontented, for discontented people rarely settle down to the quiet companionship of their needle; but as little do the busy and joyous, those in whose hearts life and hope are strong, expend their energies over fancy-work.

And such was very much the condition of the Miss Randalls. They were not discontented, but as little can it be said that they were happy. Their position—that of ladies in narrow circumstances—was precisely that in which enjoyments are most curtailed. They had appearances to keep up, they could not afford to enter much into society, for which their birth and connections made them eligible, while conventional tyranny forbade them engaging in any of those remunerative pursuits which impart interest to the lives of women of a lower class.

The Miss Randalls did not grumble over their

privations, and they made the most of their little pleasures, their tea parties, and the like. Youth, perhaps, passed away more quickly than in cases where the vital energy is kept alive by healthful outward stimulus, gray hairs and crows' feet gave warning of premature decline, the drooping lines round Miss Randall's mouth need scarcely have been so distinct as they were at thirty-six had life given her oftener occasion to smile.

In this general description of the sisters we include only the two elder, for Mildred, the youngest, was different. She was far less contented, had the appearance of being less amiable. Whether it was that years had not yet tamed her down, certain it is that she was not reconciled to accept life as the colourless blank it seemed likely to prove for her. Her sisters were wont to say that an early unprosperous love affair had embittered Mildred's temper. Story there was none beyond what has been already hinted at, and such as it was it had ended, to all intents and purposes, years before; for marriage with Frank Hotham was out of the question, and when his father sent him to Australia, the separation would have been the best thing that could have happened for them both, had the result in each case been the same. Francis, plunged at once into active

occupation, with variety of scene, and the stimulus of pushing his fortunes, did not pine long in hopeless love. But with Mildred it was different.

In the narrow groove of domestic life there was nothing to divert her thoughts; life offered her no stimulus, no object. From the barrenness of the present her only relief was in living the past over again. Every walk or conversation she had ever had with her lover was dwelt upon in memory, and the impression, instead of fading with time, deepened and increased, as "distance lent enchantment to the view."

As for the young man who was thus enshrined in this girl's imagination, good looks and high spirits were about his best recommendations. He was very young, and unformed both in character and principle. Mildred had, however, nothing better to think about, therefore she thought about him, and this attachment, which under other circumstances would have proved a mere passing fancy, coloured her life years after the object of it had ceased to think of her. Mildred was barely seventeen when Frank Hotham left Shaddon; she was now two and twenty. It was thus the very flower of her youth that was consumed in idle regret and morbid retrospection.

At home she was not genial, apt to be morose; and though she never refused to take her share of needlework or housekeeping, she did everything with a listless, dissatisfied air. Her sisters attributed the shadow which rested on her spirits entirely to her disappointment in love, and often said to each other, "It is all owing to that unfortunate business with Frank Hotham." They did not know that had there been no Frank Hotham the case would have been much the same; the mind of a young girl, full of life and energy, will feed upon something. If Mildred's active, unoccupied thoughts had not gone wrong in one direction, they assuredly would in another. Isabella and Georgina, however, having a high respect for the traditions of their youth, did believe that idle hands were prone to get into mischief, and they had a vague conviction that their young sister would be a better and a happier girl had she had some definite occupation. To provide her with employment little was in their power, but they did their best; they suggested that she should instruct a class of poor children, and Mildred caught rather eagerly at the proposition. But teaching was not to her taste; she neither gave nor received satisfaction, and a very short trial sufficed to show that her vocation did not lie in that line.

She next went in for being very religious. We do not use the expression, incongruous as it sounds, in any levity, for Mildred was quite as earnest in her devotion as half the women who flock to daily services, drawn thither, in most cases, unknown to themselves, for no other reason than that they have nothing else to do.

Under the fervour of religious zeal there was no difficulty in being very busy. It was easy to fill up her days with observances to any extent; to run from one prayer-meeting to another. And Mildred tried to believe in it all; tried to persuade herself that services and ceremonies are the homage due from the creature to the Creator, and that she and the clique to which she belonged pro tem. had the monopoly of the road to heaven.

But religion, whether ritualistic or evangelical, taken up as a resource, because she wanted something to do, proved as little congenial to her mind as school-teaching; she declared at last abruptly, to the scandal of her sisters, that she could not swear by the blessed Mr. Anybody, and she was convinced that the religion of half her acquaintances was "humbug."

One other phase Mildred had passed through. Her latest and strongest passion had been for intellectual work. She read every book she could lay her hands upon, no subject coming

amiss to her. History, science, philosophy. Her studies were desultory, because wholly undirected, yet the superstructure which she succeeded in raising on the slender foundation previously laid, was at least creditable to her diligence and capacity. But it is hard to study with absolutely no motive save the love of knowledge for its own sake. Mildred could turn her acquirements to no practical account. In a social point of view they were rather disadvantageous. The young ladies of the neighbourhood began to sneer at her as *blue*. The young gentlemen, of whom, however, there were very few in her set, to be afraid of her. So Mildred's zeal in study gradually declined, and now she was drifting with the current against which she had battled bravely, though in vain, and was resigned to novel reading and fancy work, because such seemed her inevitable destiny; but discontented from the consciousness of powers rusting unused.

Isabella and Georgina agreed confidentially that Mildred was very "trying," and one mode in which she tried them was by her love of argument. The loss of her father's estate was a grievance about which she found a good deal to say, and it was singular that while her personal associations with the paternal acres were few and vague, she was the only one of the three

sisters who spoke of the loss with bitterness, or sense of injustice.

"It is a pity the estate passed out of our branch of the family, but it could not be helped," Miss Georgina observed mildly, as they sat one evening round the table after tea, "no one was to blame. If one of our brothers had lived he would have had it, or if Isabella had been a man Randalsham would have been hers."

"But why," said Mildred, "should Isabella be cut out because she is not a man? Is it right or just that a property should pass from daughters to go to a male relation ever so many degrees removed?"

Miss Georgina felt puzzled, as well she might, to answer this question satisfactorily, she therefore merely murmured evasively, "Well, I don't know, but it was the law."

"The law? yes, that is what I quarrel with," said Mildred; "what right have men to undertake to make laws for the good of the community and then legislate selfishly for their own interest?"

"But after all," observed Miss Randall, "women have their advantages: we are safe from all the dangers to which soldiers and sailors are exposed," and Isabella drew a sigh to the memory of the lover of her youth, who slept in the valley of Inkermann.

"For the matter of that," answered Mildred, "women have their peculiar dangers which men do not share. Did not mamma die at my birth? But there is no use," she added, "in setting the actual dangers to life and limb of one sex against those of the other, for I believe, so far as that goes, the case is about as broad as it is long."

"Well, I think we are better off, in some respects, than men," observed Miss Georgina, in an indolent tone; "men have often a great deal of roughing to go through; most men have to work hard."

"I don't pity them for that," interrupted Mildred energetically, "would not I rather work hard all day as a lawyer, or a doctor, or even in some much lower capacity, than lead the vegetable life I do?"

She leaned forward, with both elbows on the table, and pushed with her hands the thick glossy hair back from her broad brow.

Her sisters, both of whom were quietly sewing, looked a little troubled. "At any rate, Mildred, I think it is a great pity that you are not a man; you would have been much happier than you choose to be as a woman."

"I wish I were, with all my heart," was the reply bitterly.

It did not at this stage of her mental develop-

ment strike Mildred that better than the futile wish that she were a man, would be the practical determination to raise her woman's life out of the narrow groove with which feminine inertness has been so long satisfied.

Among those who believe in woman's claims there seem to be minds of two classes, or it may be two stages of development of the same mind. Many women desire a wider field of action, they feel that they have power to make their way in a liberal profession, or a skilled trade, equally well with their brothers, were not every avenue to honourable and lucrative employment barred against them by either law or custom. They would gladly take advantage of any change in the established order of things; a very small opening in their favour would suffice; but it does not occur to them to break through barriers, to commence an agitation in which even laws and long-standing social institutions may receive a death-blow.

To initiate is the work of only the exceptional few.

"But Mildred," pursued Miss Randall, "I do not like to hear you speak so discontentedly. Providence has ordained your position."

"I don't think," observed Mildred reflectively, "that we have any right to say that wrongs and abuses are God's ordinance. They must rather

be the devil's. I do sometimes think that the devil must be the supreme ruler in the world."

Miss Randall folded up her work, and said significantly, "Georgina, will you be so good as ring for prayers? the servants I dare say are ready."

Yes, Mildred was certainly a trial to her sisters.

The day was always concluded with family worship, as befitted a little household of Christian ladies. The domestics, Bible in hand, entered, and took their seats respectfully at the lower end of the room. The table-maid was rather pretty, and smartly dressed. While the chapter from one of St. Paul's Epistles was being read, she kept her eyes demurely bent on the pages of her own Bible, but she was thinking all the time,

"Wonder if Jim will wait for me in the kitchen. Hope missis won't take it into her head to come down directly after prayers, to see that the doors are locked. Surely the fellow would have wit to hide himself somewhere."

Miss Georgina, sitting with her hands crossed reverently in her lap, had her eye on this young person, and the thoughts passing through her mind were, "The girl is over-smart to-night; a blue ribbon round her chignon, for all the world like a lady. I hope she is up to no mischief.

She can't, surely, have had the audacity to have a follower in the kitchen, and left him there when the bell rang! I don't like to think of a strange man being left alone with the silver spoons."

Miss Randall, as officiating priestess, gave a good deal of her attention to reading, as she considered well, and impressively; but she was able at the same time to reflect how troublesome Mildred was, and she hoped hearing the Bible read would do her good.

Mildred, for her part, had a mind very full of restless, feverish thoughts, which the late conversation had stirred up, and though when the reading came to an end, she mechanically knelt down, she would have found it difficult to say what either the chapter or the prayer had been about. And so the day was piously concluded. It is so easy, men say, for women to be religious, they are so naturally.

CHAPTER IV.

DEFERRED DIVIDENDS.

THE Miss Randalls reassembled at the breakfast table. The preparations were not for a luxuriant meal. Merely for what in hotel bills is charged as a plain breakfast. They said they never

wished for anything at that hour beyond a cup of tea, and a little toast, or bread and butter. Had more varied fare been before them, they probably would have partaken of it, and might have looked all the better and plumper for the same; but the weekly bills were ever looming in perspective before the housekeeper's imagination, to check all unnecessary expenditure on the table.

The postman's knock was heard. A welcome sound, for they were expecting the remittance of their half-yearly dividends, and as their bank account was low, the prospect was agreeable. A letter was handed to Miss Randall.

"All right," said she, "B. N. Railway Company."

Her sisters, who had a joint interest in the communication, watched her open the envelope, and inquired the amount. Something was clearly different from what Miss Randall expected, for instead of answering, she regarded the enclosure with a grave, perplexed look.

"Nothing wrong, Isabel?" asked Mildred, impatiently. "It is the warrant for our money, is it not?"

"I don't understand," said Miss Randall, slowly, holding up dubiously an official-looking paper. "We never got a *thing* like this before. It is called a deferred dividend warrant."

So limited was the experience of the sisters on all matters of business, that they really did not understand the document in question. A misgiving, however, that it betokened no good, possibly something even seriously wrong, made them anxious to get the mystery solved, and it was decided that they should apply for information to their legal neighbour, Mr. Hotham. Breakfast was hastily concluded, and at ten o'clock Miss Randall and Mildred set forth.

Small consolation was in store for them. When Miss Randall, with some trepidation of manner, introduced the object of her call by stating that she had received that morning a letter from the B. N. Railway Company, Mr. Hotham observed promptly—

"The B. N. Railway Company is insolvent. It can't even pay its debts, much less the shareholders. I hope you are not involved to any extent with it!"

"The greater part of our income is derived from our railway shares," replied Miss Randall, growing pale.

Mr. Hotham gave a low whistle. "Bad, very bad," said he.

"But does this"—holding out the warrant—"mean that we are to get no money?" asked Miss Randall, nervously.

Mr. Hotham, sorry as he really was for his

hapless client, could scarcely repress a smile at her simplicity. "You will get no money, in the meantime, at any rate, that is quite clear. You should have sold your shares long ago, when you could have got rid of them."

"But we had no suspicion anything was wrong," observed Miss Randall, apologetically. "Our money was invested for us years ago, and we have had nothing to do but to receive our dividends."

"Oh, these ladies—these ladies," muttered Mr. Hotham.

Mildred inquired what had caused the insolvency of the company, and what were its prospects for the future. He gave all the information he possessed himself on the subject, but the very terms he used required explanation to their unfamiliar ears, and it is doubtful how far the ladies were enlightened; Miss Randall was obviously only confused and puzzled; Mildred, on the contrary, listened with profound attention, and asked questions until checked by her sister.

"My dear, we are only taking up Mr. Hotham's time. These are details of business which we do not understand. The fact is enough, and too much for us. Our money is gone. We shall have henceforth about a quarter of the income we have hitherto had. Let us, how-

ever, be thankful we have each of us something secured."

The sisters walked home almost in silence. The event naturally induced reflection rather than conversation. The first observation was from Mildred, and seemed rather irrelevant.

"I think it is a great misfortune that women are brought up so ignorant of business. No man would have been so stupid as we were in understanding Mr. Hotham's explanation."

Miss Randall was not inclined to generalize on the question of female education. She answered, abstractedly—

"I am sure, Mildred, you took up all he said very intelligently."

The day was one of strange mental excitement to the sisters, not, certainly, of pleasurable emotion, but of far more vivid sensation than they usually knew. Their ordinary occupations were mechanically gone through as in a kind of dream; each, the while, silently striving to realize the calamity that had befallen them. During the day, while they were liable to interruptions, no consultations were held, though an occasional word, or brief snatch of conversation betrayed the subject uppermost in the minds of all.

It was not until evening, when they assembled in the twilight, that by tacit consent a cabinet

council was held. The discussion was opened by Miss Randall.

"There are two courses open to us," said she, "either we can continue together and bring down our mode of living to suit our reduced means, or we can go out as governesses."

"Three times sixty, a hundred and eighty," said Georgina. "For three ladies to live on a hundred and eighty pounds a year, a degree of pinching and screwing would be requisite which must be equally injurious to the health and to the character. I vote that we look out for situations."

"If you feel equal to the step, I think you are quite right," answered Miss Randall; "for my part, I have not energy to turn over such an entirely new leaf; but I must be no hindrance to you. If you two decide to take situations, I can go into a ladies' boarding-house. You remember Miss Jackson told us about one where she lived. The ladies paid from fifty to eighty pounds a year, which included everything. I should be satisfied with a small room, so I might board for fifty pounds, I daresay, and retain ten for dress."

"I have always thought," observed Mildred, joining for the first time in the conversation, "that a ladies' boarding-house must be purgatory. Miss Jackson, too, was always changing

her quarters, so I conclude she did not find the life delightful."

"No one, my dear Mildred, lives in a boarding-house by preference," replied Miss Randall mildly; "but a woman who has very little gets more comfort for her money than she could command if living alone in very poor lodgings."

"We have not heard yet what Mildred thinks we should do," remarked Miss Georgina.

Both ladies turned their eyes towards their younger sister; for Mildred had a certain weight in the family, although her opinion, when given, was often pronounced eccentric and unfeasible.

"Oh, I agree with Georgina," she replied, unhesitatingly, "that we must do something for ourselves. I differ only as to what that something should be. Teaching is the last resource I am inclined to try."

"But it is the only resource open to ladies," interposed her sisters.

"We are not fit for governesses," answered Mildred; "we know nothing ourselves."

"That is nonsense, Mildred," declared Georgina pettishly; "we are as well educated as half the women who advertise for situations, and you are the best educated of us three."

"Then bad is the best," replied Mildred; "I should be sorry"—with a sardonic laugh—"for

the children whose only chance of education was what I could give them."

"Then what do you propose?" asked her sisters, gravely.

"I have another objection to the profession of governess," pursued Mildred, unheeding the question; "even supposing we could command far higher salaries than our qualifications entitle us to ask, it is a wretched look-out at the best. A governess who obtains a hundred a year is thought to do very well. Poor remuneration that for life-long drudgery and a position which, until society changes very much, must always be reckoned a subordinate one. Why should not women enter professions in which they might rise to something, and earn their thousand, or fifteen hundred a-year?"

"Oh, that is all very fine," said Georgina; "but it is nothing to the present purpose. What do you intend to do, since you will not be a governess?"

"I do not see my way yet," replied Mildred, thoughtfully.

"That is so vague, Mildred," said Miss Randall, and the two elder sisters exchanged a look of some annoyance.

"Well, then," said Mildred, with sudden animation, "I will make a proposal. Let us all three go together into some business. No matter

what, so long as it is something that will pay. We have money enough to start with, and who knows but we may end by being better off than we have ever been."

The girl, though a hard battle in life was inevitably before her, though immediate poverty was staring her in the face, looked brighter and more hopeful than she had done for many a day. Her words, however, touched no sympathetic chord in her auditors. The response was cold and discouraging.

"My dear Mildred," in a tone of mingled compassion and reproach, "what business is there that women can go into, and retain their position as ladies? We should forfeit our standing at once."

"Be it so," answered Mildred, indifferently, "I am sure our position is not so much worth, in any sense, that we need cling to it. Not that I believe any one does forfeit even social consideration by carrying out courageously and independently their own principles."

Miss Randall shook her head. "What dangerous doctrine!"

"Well," resumed Mildred, after a minute's silence, "I have one other suggestion to offer. It is that each of us is to be at liberty to lay her own plans, independently of the other's. We have been together for a long while, living

in one narrow groove, and I am sure we have been dull enough! But now a change is inevitable, whether we will or not. Let us each take our separate line, and see what we can make of our lives. Georgina proposes to be a governess: well and good. You, Isabella, elect to live as best you can on your sixty pounds a year. Grant me equal liberty of choice. That is all I ask. Now," she added rising to beat a hasty retreat, as if anticipating opposition, "I am going to my room. Good-night. I have said my say."

CHAPTER V.

"MRS. GRUNDY" DEFIED.

As every day they continued in their present home diminished the small means of the sisters, they promptly set about the necessary change. The servants received a month's warning. An arrangement was made to get the house off their hands. Miss Randall sought daily through the columns of a borrowed newspaper for the advertisement of a boarding-house, that promised to combine economy with comfort. And Miss Georgina instituted diligent inquiries for a family in need of a governess. Mildred,

alone, took no active steps towards providing herself with a new home, or employment. To the surprise of her sisters, she procrastinated from day to day, and when questioned as to her plans, repeatedly answered, that she did not yet see her way.

She came out, however, in a new light during this time of trial as to practical usefulness. All the business letters were written and answered by her. She effected an advantageous arrangement with the incoming tenants. In short, she developed a talent for business, an energy, an unselfishness which astonished, while it excited the admiration of her sisters. They did, nevertheless, think it a strange caprice that at this very time she should engage the village schoolmaster to give her evening lessons in arithmetic and book-keeping.

"Really," they expostulated, "when every shilling is of consequence, to throw away two guineas is quite wrong and silly."

But Mildred quietly replied that she did not expect her money would be thrown away; and at every spare moment, she might be seen intently poring over columns of figures, and writing copies in an engrossing hand.

Georgina's quest for a situation resulted in her sending an advertisement to the "Times." "I think," said she, looking up from her

desk, at which she had been concocting the said advertisement, "I will get Mr. Hotham to compose the paragraph. Such a thing ought to be well expressed. I should not like there to be any little slip of grammar."

Accordingly, Georgina, accompanied by Mildred, called on the old friend of their family, and found him alone in his office.

The lawyer had a kindly feeling towards the poor ladies who had been so suddenly reduced in circumstances by no fault of their own, and he rose from his desk to place chairs for them.

"Write an advertisement for you? To be sure I will. Sit down and tell me what I am to say. What do you undertake to teach?"

The would-be governess hesitated.

"English, eh?"

"Oh, of course, English—I wish my music and drawing were better."

"Accomplishments, no doubt, are the things really paid for," he assented, "but it is necessary to put forward English. Parents like the show of something solid. Shall we say 'competent to impart a sound English education, with music and drawing?'"

"Yes; I have not kept up music or drawing

lately, and I don't think I have much turn for either. But I learnt when I was a girl."

"You intend to teach them, though? That is the point."

"I will do my best."

"What about French? Learnt abroad?"

"No, at home. I spent, by-the-by, a fortnight in Paris once, and it struck me how different the accent was. I could not understand the natives, nor they me. It was very odd, for we spoke French in our school-room, and I can read it pretty easily."

Mr. Hotham began to look dubious, and Georgina, who anxiously watched his face, with its shrewd business-like, but not unbenevolent lines, as he sat, pen in hand, with a sheet of paper before him, felt a chill come over her heart.

He broke the silence. "Are you sure," he asked, "that your vocation is to be a governess? You know to be sufficiently well educated to take your place in society is one thing, and to be qualified to impart knowledge is another."

"I know of no other means by which I can earn a living," she answered; "if I had any other resource I would not attempt to be a governess."

"A lady's companion," he suggested.

"I fear it would be a waste of time and money to advertise for such a situation. So few ladies want companions, compared to the number who engage governesses."

"That is true," he admitted.

"If," resumed Georgina, catching at a straw, "you can point out any occupation I am better fitted for, I shall be only too thankful. I have no ambition to be a governess."

He reflected a few seconds, then said, "I can think of nothing. The profession of governess seems the only one for ladies."

Still he hesitated about putting pen to paper, and Georgina thought he was about to refuse. Her heart sank, and her eyes filled with tears.

"It is a question almost of living or starving with me," she said earnestly. "I have only sixty pounds a year.

The man was touched by the helpless woman's tone. He glanced involuntarily round the office; his eyes fell on a goodly range of professional-looking tin boxes, which contained the papers of not unprofitable clients, and he remembered that the day had been when he equally had nothing to look to save his own exertions, with the important difference that he set out with a thorough useful education and an opening to a good business, the result of

which advantages was that, by the aid of moderate abilities, he had achieved a position of independence and comfort. He had a handsome house, a well-provided-for domestic circle, and enjoyed a certain amount of social consideration. Recalling his own career, with its mingled struggles and success, he could not close against this woman the one opening accessible to her.

"Come on," said he, cheerfully, "we'll do our best, and we'll make something," he added, with an encouraging smile, "of that fortnight in Paris."

He dashed off a line or two, then asked, "How about Italian or German?"

"I began German, but the declensions were so puzzling, I did not go far."

"We will say then 'the rudiments of German.' Now listen, will this do? 'Wants a situation as governess, a lady of sound Church of England principles, competent to impart a thorough English education, with music and drawing. French, acquired partly in Paris, and the rudiments of German. A comfortable home rather than a large salary is desired.'"

"Oh, thank you! that is beautiful," exclaimed the grateful Georgina, and she felt raised in her own opinion on finding that her acquirements made so respectable a figure in black and white.

The sisters took leave, but as they descended the steps, Mildred, who had been passive during the visit, said,—

"If you will walk on, Georgina, I will follow you directly. I want to speak to Mr. Hotham again for a moment," and she ran back to the office.

Mr. Hotham, who, spectacles on nose, had just resumed his examination of an intricate deed, bore this second interruption with a good nature that was creditable to his temper.

Mildred entered abruptly. Her cheek was glowing, and her eye bright with unusual animation. The two sisters were great contrasts. Georgina, though not much on the wrong side of thirty, was to all appearance a subdued, middle-aged gentlewoman, to whom life had little to offer, either in the present or future. Mildred looked, at that moment at all events, full of life and energy. She was, the old gentleman felt, as even old gentlemen will feel, the more attractive picture. His son Frank came suddenly into his mind; why, he could not have said, for the connection of ideas did not strike him; but Mildred looked, for the first time almost for years, as she used to look in the days when his boy talked nonsense about her, and filled his parents with vague fears of an early, imprudent marriage. Mildred, for her part, was wont to

regard the matter-of-fact old lawyer with sentiments of romantic interest as the father of her Frank.

To-day, however, her thoughts ran in quite another channel, Frank's existence did not trouble her at all, and his father was in her eyes simply a man of business, who could give her the information she required.

"Well, Miss Mildred," he addressed her with a smile, "am I to write an advertisement for you, too?"

"No, thank you. I have come to ask you to do something else for me, Mr. Hotham. Will you tell me what are the chief duties of a lawyer's clerk?"

"His chief duty is to do whatever his principal bids him," was the reply. "Copying deeds is a good part of the work."

"Well," said Mildred, "I could copy deeds, and I would do whatever I was bid, and what I am ignorant of at present I would learn. Will you take me as a clerk into your office?"

Mr. Hotham raised his eyebrows, and laughed aloud.

"Ha! ha!" he exclaimed, "I am afraid your presence in my office, Miss Mildred, would not facilitate the work being done. Your bright eyes might rather distract the attention of my other clerks."

Mildred's brow darkened, and her colour rose, but from annoyance, not from gratified vanity.

"Pray don't speak such nonsense. That is the way men always talk when women mean business. Seriously, Mr. Hotham, will you give me a trial in your office?"

"Seriously then, my dear Miss Mildred, I cannot."

"Why?" she asked, bluntly.

"Oh—because you know—there are men's occupations and women's occupations. Woman's sphere—"

"Woman's fiddlesticks!" interrupted Mildred, impatiently.

Mr. Hotham regarded her curiously through his spectacles with an expression that seemed to say, "You are a singular young lady, troublesome at home, I have no doubt. But," said he aloud, "if you wish to do something, why not follow Miss Georgina's example? I shall have great pleasure in helping you to the best of my ability in that line."

"I don't know enough myself to presume to teach others," replied Mildred, coldly, "and anyhow I do not wish to be a governess."

"It is a nice feminine occupation," he suggested, "teaching the young idea — good practice for you, Miss Mildred." Mildred frowned impatiently. "Since this unfortu-

nate railway business breaks up your happy home—"

"That is all you know about it, Mr. Hotham. We were horribly dull at home. During all these years we have had nothing to do but to get up in the morning, eat our meals, dress for calls, and go to bed. No mill horses could have had a more monotonous round. If I could only find any remunerative employment, I should be quite glad, for my own part, that the smash has come."

"Really! strange—I could not have thought it. But I do commend your dear sister as an example. She is accommodating herself—"

"Good-bye, Mr. Hotham," interrupted Mildred, "I must not take up more of your morning, and I have no time to waste myself. No—don't open the door, though I am a *woman* I am capable of doing that for myself."

Georgina Randall's advertisement was answered by a lady who stated that she had two little girls to be educated. Some correspondence ensued, which resulted in her being engaged at a salary of thirty pounds per annum. Miss Randall was likewise successful in finding a boarding-house which promised "the comforts of a home, with refined society," for the moderate sum that suited her pecuniary resources.

The only one of the three who remained unprovided for was Mildred.

Were it not that she went about with a very thoughtful face, and whenever she was at leisure sat long intervals in silence, it might have appeared that her mind was wholly engrossed by the business of the hour—packing, taking inventories, and assisting her sisters in their preparations. When pressed to decide her own plans she set aside the subject, saying that if nothing better offered, she could accompany Isabella to the boarding-house, and look about her from thence. This satisfied them. Miss Randall would have been well pleased with such an arrangement, and began to reckon on its being carried out, when Mildred one morning entering the sitting-room, announced—

"Well, Isabella, I have decided on my course of action; I shall go to London and try what employment I can find. It is much better to look out personally than to waste time by advertising and writing."

Miss Randall dropped her work with an exclamation.

"I shall do nothing the least wrong or indiscreet," continued Mildred, earnestly, well knowing that the words that rose to her sister's lips were "London? By yourself, Mildred?" "But I want to find out by personal inquiry

what openings there are for an educated woman to earn her daily bread. I shall arm myself with recommendations from each of the clergymen, the doctor, and Mr. Hotham, vouchers for my respectability."

"O—h!"

"I shall go into a quiet lodging, and prosecute my search. There are many things I am fit for. I now am good at book-keeping and arithmetic. I shall try first to obtain a situation as clerk in a bank or mercantile office; though Mr. Hotham would have nothing to say to me, I hope in such a large field as London to meet with people who are less prejudiced. If that attempt fails I think I shall apply at a printer's office. Setting types would be rather to my taste. If that proves no go—why—I may sweep a crossing. But it won't come to that," she added, hastily, "I shall move heaven and earth until I find an opening. Once let me have half a chance, and I can do the rest for myself."

Mildred was allowed to proceed uninterruptedly, her tone growing more and more energetic, for Miss Randall sat speechless until the door opened, and her sister entered, laden with needlework, when she exclaimed, "Georgina, here is Mildred actually talking about going to London to look for a situation as clerk. Do come and dissuade her."

"To London? to live alone? Impossible! She can't be in earnest."

"Impossible or not, it is what I am going to do," Mildred replied, resolutely; and there was a light in her eye that might have warned any one that opposition was useless.

The elder sisters, however, did not yield without a warm argument, which ended in Miss Randall saying, helplessly—

"Well, Mildred, if you choose to be so self-willed, we have neither the power nor the right to control you."

"Of course you have not," retorted Mildred, ungraciously.

Miss Randall looked hurt, and Mildred's conscience pricked her. She threw her arms round her sister's neck. "Isabella, dear, forgive me, I am an ill-tempered beast, I know; but I am worried and miserable. What is the good of being a slave to *Mrs Grundy* all one's life? In fact it is what I will not submit to. Remember, we agreed each to take our own line, and this is mine. I promise you that I will do nothing wrong or foolish in London, and as soon as I see my way at all, I will write to you frankly and fully."

CHAPTER VI.

CUT ADRIFT.

KING'S CROSS station—about eight o'clock on an early March morning—a train just arrived from the country. On the platform the usual bustle and stir; guards hurrying here and there; passengers, for the most part, eager only to secure their luggage, and take their departure. Among the crowd was one who seemed in no hurry to quit the station—a girl, in a plain dark dress and hat, who stood, holding in her hand a travelling-bag. She had alighted from a third-class carriage, and now lingered on the platform, while the chill morning air blew cold upon her cheek, and the hum of the London streets reached her ear from without.

It was Mildred Randall. Behind her, left for ever, were the scenes of her past life, and before her lay a vague and utterly unknown future. Yet, far from feeling sad or depressed, Mildred felt more buoyant in spirit than she had done for many a day. Hope and energy were strong in her heart. Where was Frank Hotham now? At the farthest end of the earth, so far as her thoughts were concerned, as well as in reality.

We have never described Mildred. She is not

a beautiful heroine, but still less is she a plain one. A well-grown, fine-looking girl, with a pair of dark eyes that could say a good deal; a clear brunette complexion, and a very varying expression. Her manner was inconsistent, at times listless and indolent, but even in the listlessness there was something that conveyed the idea of a latent energy and fire, and it often changed very rapidly to great animation. The style of dress of the day became her. The jacket set off her rounded figure, and her features showed to advantage beneath a hat.

The platform was nearly cleared before Mildred stirred. Why should she be in a hurry to go? She had plenty of time. No friends were expecting her. She had no engagements. No home or meal was prepared for her. A guard approached, and inquired, civilly, whether she had got her luggage.

"I have none," she replied briefly.

"A cab, ma'am?"

Mildred shook her head, but the questions roused her, and she hastened away.

Having refreshed her toilette in the waiting-room, and taken some breakfast, she next set out to look for lodgings. As all she demanded was cleanliness and an appearance of respectability, she was not long in finding apartments to suit. They consisted of a very dingy little sitting-room,

with a small bedroom adjoining ; but no sooner had she engaged this domicile than she looked round it with extreme complacency. The certainty that she could live as she liked, go out and come in unquestioned, gave her a feeling of independence that was as new as it was inspiriting. Then she procured a newspaper, and studied carefully the advertisements of situations vacant. There seemed to be a considerable demand for clerks in the offices both of merchants and lawyers. True, the persons invited to apply were young men, but Mildred argued that if she could do the work as well, a young woman was as good as a young man. She carefully copied out two or three addresses, and, as the best part of the day still lay before her, she deemed it expedient to lose no time, but apply at once.

Her first impulse was to take a cab, when it struck her that an omnibus would be cheaper. She had been brought up to think this mode of transit "not the thing" for a lady, and her sisters never did enter a conveyance of the kind except under protest. But Mildred reflected that false shame is a very expensive indulgence for poor people, and she resolved, once for all, to shake herself free of it. Her first interview, which was in a merchant's office, was a very brief one. The gentleman, who received her civilly on her

entrance, grew very curt indeed, so soon as she stated her object, informing her that she was under a mistake; the business was not one that employed females (so he chose to designate her sex), and men only were eligible for the vacant clerkship. She might have known that from the advertisement, and saved herself some trouble. The tone was so decided that she felt at once perseverance was useless. Nevertheless, she did urge that if she was competent to discharge the duties, there could be no reason to reject her, simply because she was not a man. She had recommendations as to capability.

No, no, waving them aside, that had nothing to do with it. If she wanted employment, there were plenty of avocations suitable to women, teaching, dressmaking—and she was bowed out of the room.

Undaunted by this repulse, Mildred proceeded to another office, and from thence to another, the addresses of which she had copied from the "Times." To one lawyer and two merchants she applied that morning, but the interview we have just sketched may stand for each in turn, as having related how one gentleman refused to entertain her application, even to question her as to her qualifications, or to look at her testimonials, because she was a woman, we have given the gist of every conversation.

At the end of the day, though disappointed, she was not cast down. It was hardly to be expected, she reasoned, that she should succeed the very first day; so she took her tea with a good appetite, slept soundly, and started fresh next morning.

We shall not follow Mildred's steps day by day, in the disheartening search on which she was bent. The story was always the same. Beginning in hope, ending in disappointment, she usually started from her lodgings soon after breakfast, and seldom returned till evening. She left no stone unturned. She applied at register-offices, which professed to provide women with employment, but the only resources they offered were teaching, sewing, or serving in shops. One gentleman to whom she made application for a vacant situation as book-keeper, advised her to put her pride in her pocket, and take to domestic service. One comment only let us offer, that if it would be wearisome to read the details of such a search, what must it have been to undergo the reality?

One day, she determined to vary the direction of her search, and alighted from an omnibus, within a short distance of a large printing establishment, which had advertised for some extra hands. They were grimy-looking premises into which she penetrated, at the top of a

long stair. But to Mildred there was nothing repulsive in the aspect of the place. She had an innate love for all connected with literature, and she felt that many a calling would be more distasteful to her than the humblest occupation in connection with the craft.

An intelligent-looking man came forward, expecting an order, but on her explaining that she desired to learn the art of type-setting, he replied at once, "We do not employ women."

How tired Mildred's ears were of these words! She was tempted to turn on her heel and retire at once from the field. Her case, however, was getting too nearly desperate for her to afford to be *touchy*. She was encouraged, moreover, by the civil manner and thoughtful face of the master-printer; she, therefore, stood her ground.

"But though it is contrary to your custom to employ women, there can be no reason why you should not. It would be no disadvantage to you if your work were equally well done. Printing is a trade peculiarly suited to women. Our fingers are more delicate than men's, and are particularly adapted for setting type."

"Very likely," the man assented, "but women are not allowed to compete with men in it."

"But women have as much right to live as men," said Mildred, with rising indignation

"and where a woman is forced by circumstances to earn her own livelihood, if every remunerative business is closed against her, what can she do?"

"That's true," the man admitted, and looked thoughtfully on the ground.

"I wish to make this a mere business transaction," pursued Mildred, "You require additional hands, and I am able to fulfil the conditions of your advertisement. If, after a trial, you find that I am incompetent, or if your situation does not suit me, our engagement comes to an end, and there is no harm done. I have excellent recommendations," she added, "as I will show."

The man ran his eye over the letters—seemed still to hesitate and reflect, but at length he said, "Well, I don't mind if I give it a trial."

Mildred felt as grateful for this "leave to toil" as many a woman feels for an opening that promises luxury and idleness. She went home in great spirits, and wrote without delay to both her sisters that she had obtained a situation in which she expected to be very happy, and though the remuneration was small, certainly, it would enable her to pay her way.

The following morning she rose with an unwonted sense of responsibility. She was going to her work. To earn money. To be no longer

a drone in the busy hive of human industry, but to depend upon her own ability and intelligence for getting on in life.

When she took her place in the composing-room, she was conscious that she was an object of much attention, and that the scrutiny was the contrary of friendly. The boys grinned and nudged each other, but the men cast sullen glances towards her. They spoke loudly, one to another; if she happened to approach a group, they would burst out into singing scraps of comic songs, and any man who had occasion to pass, pushed rudely by. Altogether, she could not say that the attitude of her fellow-workers was agreeable.

But Mildred was resolved not to be fastidious; she quietly took up her own line, which was to be civil and obliging whenever she was brought into immediate contact with any of the others, but, as the Scotch saying is, to "keep herself to herself," and as there was no more open rudeness than we have described, things seemed to go on smoothly.

At first, of course, she was awkward at her new occupation, but it was only practice that she required, and from the very outset she did not dislike the work, even though it involved considerable soiling of her fingers. For rather, she said to herself, would she be thus employed than

teaching like Georgina, or living in a boarding-house with Isabella.

It is wonderful what advantage, in acquiring even a mechanical art, is possessed by a person of superior intelligence and energy. Mildred bent the whole powers of her mind to learn her new trade, and she was conscious that she made very rapid progress. She was beginning to feel quite in her element, when one morning at the end of about a week, happening to encounter the head of the establishment, just as she entered the room, she asked him some question regarding her work for the day. He gave the required direction, but added,

"It does not signify, for we shall have to part."

Mildred was thunder-struck. "I hoped you were satisfied with me," she said; "I feel myself that I am getting into the way of the work. May I ask what fault I have committed?"

"None that I am aware of," he replied, "but —come in here, if you please."

He led the way into a recess, where stood his own desk and chair, and said, "It is just as I expected, the men won't stand females being introduced to compete with them. They called a meeting of their trade union last night, and passed a resolution that they will not work with women."

"But men who have one spark of generosity could not be so selfish," exclaimed Mildred; "many of them must know by experience what it is to want employment. How is a woman to live who is thrust out of every honest calling?"

"That is not the way men look at it," answered the printer, "they have had the monopoly so long that they regard it as their right. Anyhow, I have no choice. These trades unions exercise a most tyrannical power over masters as well as over men; I shall lose every hand on the place if I persist in introducing women into this room."

Mildred, with all her strong-mindedness, was only a girl, a girl, too, whose feelings were keen and impetuous. Do not despise her when we say that it was all she could do to choke back her tears. The catastrophe was so bitter and unexpected that had she attempted to utter a word, she must have broken down.

She had time to recover herself, and to do so she made a desperate effort while the printer was counting out a week's wages.

He seemed to regret the part he had to perform, for he observed hesitatingly, "If you would care for employment as folder until you find something better, I should be happy to retain you on the premises. Women and girls

are largely employed in that capacity, only not as compositors."

Mildred had seen girls busily engaged in folding the freshly-printed sheets. She now asked, "How does it happen that men do not exclude them from that branch of the business also?"

"The case is different," was the reply, "the wages are very small; it is not worth men's while to interfere."

Oh, wonderful generosity of the stronger animal! Every remunerative branch of industry men appropriate to themselves, and call, if needful, meetings of their trades unions forcibly to exclude women, but they graciously leave them undisturbed possession of those inferior branches in which the earnings are insignificant!

Mildred shook her head. Mechanically she picked up the small sum of money, her first and her last earnings at the printing trade, and moved towards the door. Before opening it, she turned round to say, "Will you oblige me by answering one question, 'Do you suppose that this feeling against women entering the printing trade is peculiar to the set of men in your employ, or am I likely to encounter the same wherever I go?' I am very anxious to obtain permanent employment, and would grudge

no fatigue or trouble to seek for it. But if I am to meet with a repetition of this treatment it would be a mere waste of time."

"I believe there is not a printing establishment in London, or probably elsewhere," was the reply, "where, if the attempt were made to introduce female labour, the men would not throw down their composing sticks and walk off the premises."

Mildred went downstairs with something of the feeling that may be experienced by a hunted animal. Yet we are told that men are women's natural protectors!

She walked some time before she took any heed of the direction in which she was going. She walked, because she had nothing else to do. For the first time since her arrival in London, she was absolutely without an object. There were copies of other advertisements in her pocket-book, but she felt that to apply for the situations would be only courting repulse, a useless expenditure of strength and money. She turned from one street into another, indifferent where they led. It was too early to return to her lodgings, and she had nothing whatever to do to pass the hours between then and bedtime. She wandered listlessly on until she got clear of the narrow streets which sur-

rounded the printing office, and, at last, found herself in Oxford Street.

The tide of life and business seemed to stimulate her. She roused herself to try and form some plan. To ensure bread to eat, she must do something, and that speedily, for her money was melting away day by day, and she began to fear that she might be, after all, forced to fall back on either teaching or needlework as her only resource. But Mildred had a conscientious objection to undertaking the former, and the needle was uncongenial to her. Rather than attempt what she was not fit for, she would try what engagement she could obtain in some warehouse or shop. At that moment, she happened to pass a large silk mercer's, the window of which presented a glittering sheen of many coloured fabrics and rich mantles. It occurred to her that there, at all events, she could not be met with the intimation, "We do not employ women," and that the remuneration might be as good as in more intellectual occupations.

She entered and requested to speak with the master of the shop.

"You employ women in this establishment?"

"Certainly."

"Do you happen to be in want of an extra hand?"

The man ran his eye critically over Mildred's

figure. In shops of any pretension a good air and manner in the attendants is greatly insisted upon. Though Mildred was very plainly dressed, her appearance obviously produced an impression in her favour. It was the commencement of the season, and he replied, "We could take on an extra hand."

"What wages do you give?" asked Mildred.

"That depends," was the cautious reply. "Have you been out before?"

"No, but I have not much fear but that I would soon learn all that you require. I am quick at accounts, and write a good hand, as I am ready to show."

"Have you references?"

"Yes, here they are."

The man examined the credentials carefully, especially the signatures. Then said, "It is unfortunate you have not been out before. We prefer experienced hands. You would have to give the first three months."

Mildred, after a moment's reflection, replied, "I should not object. I am aware that in every business one must serve some sort of apprenticeship. But supposing I prove efficient, what amount of salary may I look forward to obtaining?"

The shopkeeper seemed unwilling to commit himself. "The salaries of our young ladies

average about fifteen shillings a week," said he.

"And would I have to provide my own board and lodging out of that?"

"Your own lodging, and board excepting dinner; that is provided on the premises."

"The pay is not much," said Mildred, "and there seems to be little to look forward to. Am I to understand that fifteen shillings a week are the average wages of the men and women whom I see in this shop?"

"I was speaking of the wages of our young ladies," was the reply; "the arrangement with the gentlemen is of course different."

"If I come here I shall call myself a young woman," observed Mildred. "But what is the difference in the amount of work exacted. For if you give less wages to women, of course their hours of work are shorter."

"The hours of work are the same in both cases," was the reply, unblushingly.

"Thank you," said Mildred, "I need not trouble you further; that sort of arrangement would not suit me," and she walked out.

CHAPTER VII.

A DARK HOUR.

It is difficult to say by what connection of ideas, but as we laid down the pen after concluding the last chapter—a depressing record of disappointment and defeat—there flashed into our thoughts the verse from the Bible, "If ye had faith ye could remove mountains." In what sense are those words to be accepted? There is more than one current interpretation which events fail to bear out. The experience of many of us proves that it is possible to misinterpret them. Countless are the prayers which have been offered in childlike trusting faith, to which no response has been received. Woe to him who chooses to believe that the Arm that moves the world will move at his bidding, that natural laws will be suspended, or a miracle wrought in his behalf. Such persuasion can lead only to scepticism, if not to ultimate atheism; since individual experience confutes the doctrine. But is there no practical encouragement to be drawn from those words of Christ? Look at what is daily achieved by persevering, untiring effort. There is a faith in our own power to do what we know is right, to

accomplish the end we purpose to ourselves. A determination to overcome all obstacles, a conviction that truth and justice must ultimately prevail—there is the faith that removes mountains.

It was long before Mildred felt in any degree crushed by her failures. When disappointed in one quarter she applied with renewed hope to another; returning again and again to the charge only the more bent on success after each defeat. Discouragement, beyond a certain point, is not good for any one. The temper can hardly fail of becoming soured. It is not pleasant to describe how this girl, who set out full of joyous hope, believing in the kindness, or at least in the justice, of her fellow-creatures, changed gradually into the misanthropical woman, cherishing a dogged determination to attain her object. But the fault was not hers, and it would be well if some persons who blame the attitude occasionally assumed by women who are labouring to achieve their own political and social enfranchisement, would pause and consider whether it is well to subject others to treatment which compels them to strain all their energies and harden their sensibilities.

After Mildred's ejection from the printing office her feelings underwent a change. She felt hopeless. It mattered not that there were

vacant situations, the situations were not for her. Bitterly she repented having written so hastily to her sisters that she was provided for. But there was one thing Mildred had gained, which, in counting up her losses in the way of time and strength, she omitted to reckon; that something, too, almost as precious as success—experience. The sum of what she had learnt during those many hours spent in calling at London offices and shops, and traversing on foot and in omnibuses countless streets, was—I. That almost every lucrative means of earning a livelihood is closed against women, as women; II. That in those occupations which are open to them they receive a mere pittance of remuneration, about half of what is given to a man for performing precisely the same work, and that in many cases a woman's wages are so small as to be insufficient to enable her to live honestly.

And this experience was valuable, inasmuch as it is well to know the world in which we live.

The day on which she left the printer's office she returned late in the afternoon to her solitary lodging, the little room which had appeared so bright when first she occupied it, because gilded by the delusive sunshine of her own buoyant spirits; but the sunshine had faded from her heart now, and the small apartment, as she re-

entered it this evening, looked to her eyes only the dingy, shabby abode it really was. She threw off her hat on to the nearest chair and sat down, wearied in body and sad at heart.

Her landlady entered with the tea-tray. She looked at Mildred, who, taking no notice of her entrance, sat with her head resting on her hands. The woman was good natured; she thought the young lady must be very tired, since she was so grave and quiet; she had been out all day, perhaps she had had no dinner.

"The bread is very stale," she remarked, "I had better make some toast."

"No matter," said Mildred, without looking up, "I am not hungry."

She felt unable to eat, though she had taken no dinner. In fact she was drifting towards that state of mind in which people are reckless as to what becomes of them. She was even beginning, unconsciously, to experience the feeling that leads a man or a woman to commit suicide. Life offers nothing, tired of its struggle and turmoil, the grave would be a peaceful rest.

Oh, let us ever judge very leniently of whatever sins may be committed by our suffering and despairing fellow-creatures!

The landlady, as she cut some slices from the loaf, looked inquisitively at her lodger.

"You'll be a teacher, I am thinking?"

"No," said Mildred, "I am not. Teachers are very ill paid. All women's labour is very badly paid. I think about the most profitable must be letting lodgings as you do."

"It's precarious, miss. But I get along pretty well, since it has pleased the Lord to take my husband, and leave me a lone widder woman."

"Ah, when your husband was alive he worked for you," said Mildred.

"Why I can't exactly say that; it was rather me as worked for him. Not that I ever minded work, but he was fond of a glass, and sometimes I did feel there was no good my being saving and industrious, when he would come and make away with all I could save. Once I was real aggravated. We had just set up lodgings, and the rooms wouldn't let because there wasn't enough in 'em. There was to be a sale next door, so I stinted, and almost starved myself, to save a bit of money against it come off; I put it into the savings' bank in my own name, but when I went to draw it out on the morning of the sale, if he hadn't been afore me, and I never knew what become of it."

"He had no right to do that," said Mildred.

"Why there is just the mischief, miss, he knowed he had the right; the law gived it him.

When the men see that those learned gentlemen who make our laws hold women as having no rights nor nothing, they naturally copies their betters. I suppose, ma'am, the parliamentary gentlemen can't be expected to care for the sufferings of us poor women, and the laws likely don't hurt their ladies."

"You are right so far," said Mildred, who sat gazing into vacancy, "that few people care to redress evils which do not affect themselves."

The woman rubbed her eyes with her apron.

"Deary me! John's in his grave, and I don't mean to complain of him, for I was well off compared to some. He never lifted his hand against me, I must say; not like my sister's husband; I have seen her black and blue from that blackguard's blows. Once he beat her with the fire-shovel, which marks she'll bear to her dying day, and the sight of one eye has never been right since."

"But," exclaimed Mildred, roused at last to animation, "she should have appealed to the law for protection. A woman does very wrong who is too forbearing with a bad husband."

"Lor', ma'am, she had no feeling of that kind, she daren't, she was afraid for her life. She summoned him again and again, but where was the good? they would give him three days, or dismiss him with a caution."

"And is your sister still living with him?" asked Mildred.

"No, miss, she is quit of him. He took a greatcoat at last, belonging to another man, so they give him seven year for that, and a good riddance, I say, for her."

"Three days for half killing his wife," murmured Mildred, "and seven years for stealing a greatcoat. Such is English legislation."

The woman left the room, leaving Mildred a shade more sad and dispirited than before, from the impression of this conversation. She poured out a cup of tea, and broke a piece of toast, but she had no appetite, and pushing away her plate she stretched out her hand for a newspaper that happened to be lying near. More from habit than in the hope of finding anything to suit, she turned to the advertising columns, and her eye fell on the following:

"Clerk wanted in a merchant's office, must understand book-keeping, be steady and punctual, and able to produce good references. Persons thus qualified are requested to apply in own handwriting to Mr. Cook, &c. Salary to commence at thirty shillings per week."

Mildred's face brightened. Here was no limitation to male applicants, and in an instant all her energy seemed to reawaken. She fetched her desk at once, and wrote as follows:

"SIR,—Having seen your advertisement for a clerk in to-day's 'Times,' I beg to state that I believe myself competent to fill the situation. I understand figures and book-keeping, can produce good references, and would do my utmost to give you satisfaction.—I am, sir, your obedient servant, MILDRED RANDALL."

Dark and late though it was, she ran out with this letter to the post, and when she returned she was able, after all, to take her tea with a good appetite.

Very anxiously did she look out for an answer. It duly arrived. With a trembling hand she tore open the envelope. The applicant was briefly requested to call at Mr. Cook's office as early as was convenient.

Mildred's heart bounded. She was not to be refused even a hearing, simply because she was a woman. If finally rejected on the grounds of incompetence, she would not complain; but she had a modest confidence in her own powers of giving satisfaction, if once put on her trial; all she wanted was a chance, and this chance it seemed was now to be granted her.

CHAPTER VIII.

WON BY A FLUKE.

"A VERY singular mistake indeed. The applicant whom I requested to call I imagined to be a young man. We do not employ women. This is a merchant's office, ma'am. It is quite a surprise to me to find that my correspondent is a lady."

"I intended no deception; I signed my full name, sir."

"Which I took to be that of a gentleman. Mildred Randall is a man's name."

"The possibility of any misunderstanding on that account never occurred to me, sir. Mildred is not an unusual woman's name."

"May be so. I am not used to it, though I have met with it as a surname, and that misled me."

"But in your advertisement, sir, there is no limitation as to sex. Qualified *persons* are requested to apply. A woman, I presume, is a person."

"Oh, yes, certainly, in one sense—I may say in most senses; but not in the sense in which the word was used there."

These opinions were delivered by a short, elderly gentleman, wearing gold-rimmed spectacles, and very white linen, who confronted Mildred in the private room of a well-furnished office. Through the half-open door might be seen the adjoining apartment, in which several youths, occupying desks and high stools, were busily engaged writing.

"Then do you refuse to give me even a trial?" asked Mildred.

"How can I do otherwise, madam? The thing is unheard of. Mr. Walsh!"

"Sir."

And in answer to the summons there appeared a tall, rather striking-looking man, of about thirty, who entered pen in hand.

"Here is a strange mistake. The letter we received yesterday in such good, clear handwriting, was, it seems, from this young lady, who offers herself for the vacant clerkship."

The other smiled—a natural, amused, but not ill-natured smile—and, without speaking, looked intently at Mildred.

"I am sorry Miss Randall has had the trouble of calling," pursued Mr. Cook, "but such inversion of all established custom could never answer—could it, Mr. Walsh?"

"I cannot say, sir: the experiment has never been tried."

"Of course not! It would be something entirely new."

"We hear of many new things at the present day," observed Mr. Walsh carelessly, "and some of them answer very well."

"And if that is your only objection," said Mildred eagerly, addressing Mr. Cook, "why not try the experiment? I do not think that you will find me less intelligent or industrious than your other clerks."

"My dear young lady," replied the merchant, kindly, "I have no doubt of it. Indeed I know ladies who render valuable assistance to their husbands and fathers in copying and book-keeping."

"Oh, I understand," interrupted Mildred, bitterly, "a woman may work as hard as she likes so long as her services are gratuitous. It is only remunerative employment she is refused."

"Nay, you judge us hardly," remonstrated the old gentleman; "a woman's privilege is to be worked for, not to work herself."

"By husbands, I suppose you mean," said Mildred, looking Mr. Cook full in the face; "and what of women who have none?"

"Why, then," laughing, "the sooner a nice young woman gets a husband the better. Take my advice, Miss Randall, make some honest

man happy, and find your own happiness in doing your duty as a good wife and mother."

"From the opinion I have been forced to form of men," rejoined Mildred, scornfully, "during the time I have been vainly seeking an opening to earn my bread, I doubt if the man exists whom I would marry."

Both gentlemen looked at her earnestly as she pronounced this bold sarcasm. Mr. Cook said—

"Even supposing, for a moment, that I could give you this situation, you would not like it. You would have to sit for hours at one of those desks writing and adding up columns of figures. You would be entirely under the orders of my friend, Mr. Walsh, there, and he could treat you, remember, with none of the deference and consideration that a lady is accustomed to receive from a gentleman in a drawing-room."

"I know precisely the value of such consideration," interrupted Mildred; "I can afford to dispense with it."

"It would be his duty," continued Mr. Cook, "to keep you quite as strictly to your work as he does the other clerks. If you were idle or negligent he would have to reprove you."

"I would endeavour to give him little occasion to find fault."

"Tut, tut!" said the old gentleman, impa-

tiently, "we are wasting time. Now I'll tell you what, Miss Randall; in consideration of the mistake, which might have been avoided by a more explicit wording of the advertisement, I am willing to pay you a week's salary as compensation for your trouble and loss of time; and that is the best I can do."

He opened a cash-box, and extracted a sovereign and a half, which he tendered to Mildred. She drew back.

"Thank you, but I accept no pay except for services rendered. Suffer me, in consideration, as you say, of the mistake, to earn that money by doing one week's work in your office."

Possibly the recollection of the fox in the fable, which asked to get in only the end of his tail, may have vaguely passed through worthy Mr. Cook's mind, for he demurred. "I do not think we can consent to that—eh, Mr. Walsh?"

"I don't know why you should not, sir."

"What," said his principal, turning briskly round, "you surely do not advocate the admission of women into merchants' offices?"

"I think," was the reply, deliberately, "that when a woman is called upon to earn her own livelihood she should, in common justice, have a fair field, even though," with a half smile, "it may be a fair field and no favour."

Mildred involuntarily threw at him a look of gratitude.

"That is my motto," she said; "a fair field and no favour is all I ask."

"Well," said Mr. Cook slowly, "I was not prepared to hear you, Walsh, advocate such an innovation. What the age is coming to, I can't think! Yet I must confess I have never had occasion to distrust your judgment; and so, young lady, in consideration of the mistake that has occurred—a very annoying and unfortunate one—I consent to take you temporarily into my office. But let not this interfere with your looking out for some more suitable feminine occupation."

Mildred expressed her acknowledgments in a few brief, though earnest, words, and the interview ended.

Mr. Cook seemed dissatisfied with the result, for his comment was, "I wish that girl had stuck to her needle-work, instead of forcing herself where she is not wanted. Now, mind, Walsh, you are to treat that young lady precisely as you do the other clerks; no allowances whatever are to be made for her."

To which Mr. Walsh replied, as he bent over a ledger, "I shall be surprised, sir, if she requires any allowance to be made for her."

Mildred hurried homewards with strangely

mingled feelings. She had carried her point, and it would be but natural that she should feel triumphant. Yet she had not proceeded many steps before she put up her hand to brush away fast-gathering tears. Her thought was this—

"I have succeeded at last, but why have I had to encounter all these rebuffs simply because I am a woman? Surely to seek to support myself by honest labour is good and laudable, yet the obstacles thrown in my path could not have been greater, or probably half so great, had I attempted something sinful. Then, though I have succeeded, how many women, there must be equally, or even more, dependent on their own exertions, who do not succeed. Women striving bravely to make good their footing in God's world, and man denying them the chance."

And Mildred, who had sometimes been accused of being hard and indifferent towards others, felt her heart expand with a yearning desire to help every struggling and oppressed member of her own sex. No woman, however poor or faulty, or even what the world calls fallen, could have crossed Mildred's path that night to whom she would not have extended a loving hand of sisterhood.

CHAPTER IX.

A WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE MEETING.

WEEKS passed on, and found Mildred still enjoying the privilege of a stool and desk in Mr. Cook's office. During her probation she was conscious of being regarded with jealous distrust, and almost a wish, at least on the part of her principal, that she might be found wanting. But this very circumstance put her on her mettle. She resolved that, if she were discharged, the onus of her dismissal should rest entirely on her employers. It is possible that, in some respects, she did Mr. Cook scant justice. Though precise and methodical, he was a kind and conscientious man, not more wedded to old-world prejudices than was quite pardonable, considering that he had passed the greater portion of his sixty years in one groove.

From time to time he repeated the injunction to his head clerk—

"Now, Mr. Walsh, I hope you are making no allowances for Miss Randall. If you find her not quite up to the mark, let me know at once."

"I shall certainly do so, sir," Mr. Walsh would briefly reply.

Mildred had expressed her wish to be treated neither better nor worse than the other clerks, and Mr. Walsh, with whom she had personally much more to do than with Mr. Cook, gave her her wish. The same punctuality was exacted of her, she was spared no task on account of her sex, no accidental oversight passed unnoticed. At the same time his manner was uniformly such as made her feel that she had a gentleman to deal with. While preserving the somewhat dry, matter-of-fact tone which suited their relative positions, he took considerable pains to initiate her into the routine of business. One day Mr. Cook, who happened to overhear him patiently explaining to Mildred the best mode of book-keeping, observed—

"You seem to take a great deal of trouble with that young person, Walsh."

"She is worth taking trouble for," was the reply.

"Ah! you find her intelligent."

"I have no hesitation in saying, sir, that Miss Randall is the best clerk we ever had in the office. Her presence checks a great deal of useless talking and idling. If I am obliged to go out, I know that the work will proceed as steadily in my absence as under my own eye. Were Miss Randall to leave, I consider she would be a loss."

During the first few weeks, Mildred lived in constant dread of being told that her temporary engagement was at an end. But no hint of the kind was given, nor, as she took care to inform herself, was the advertisement repeated in the "Times;" and when, one wet day, as she was hanging up her waterproof cloak, Mr Walsh said to her, "You live too far away from your work, Miss Randall, you should take a lodging nearer the office," Mildred regarded the advice as an intimation that she was to retain her situation.

On the strength of this understanding, she set about making a home for herself in London. She ventured to take a better lodging, in a more convenient locality. She sent for her books and other belongings, and, surrounded once more by her household gods, she felt that her dwelling had assumed a home-like aspect.

Her daily routine was regular as clock-work. By ten every morning she was at the office; she worked usually till five; then took the refreshment of a walk, weather permitting; returned home to dinner, and spent the evening in reading or needle-work. And all this time she had not encountered a single old acquaintance, nor had she even the desire for any variety.

"PUBLIC MEETING.—WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE.—A LECTURE on the above subject will be given by Miss ALTHEA WARBURTON, on ——— Evening. Chair will be taken by ———, Esq., M.P., at eight o'clock."

This advertisement, in big letters, placarded on a wall, caught Mildred's eye as she walked one morning to the office. She paused to read it through. She knew definitely very little of the question to which it referred. Since she came to London, her whole attention had been given to her business; and in Shaddon, which, like most quiet country places, was slow in taking up new ideas, it was, as we have seen, deemed not *the thing* to go in for women's rights.

Secretly, Mildred admired the ladies—at that time few in number—who had the courage to come forward to vindicate the claims of their sex. She even believed in Miss Althea Warburton—the head and front of the offending. She did feel that this lady as pioneer in the movement was doing a great and noble work, for which after-generations might call her blessed.

When Mildred reached the office she found no one there save Mr. Walsh, who was skimming the contents of a newspaper. As she sat down to her desk, he suddenly asked, with a peculiar smile,

"I suppose this is in your line, Miss Randall—do you go in for women's suffrage?"

"I go in for helping women in any way I

can," answered Mildred; "at least, I should like to do so. But I do not know much about suffrage."

"Here you are then," said he, and he handed her the paper, pointing to an advertisement similar to the one she had already seen.

"What do you think of the movement?" she asked.

"I think," was the evasive reply, "that we shall soon see whether it has any vitality or not. If it has not, it will subside when the novelty is over. If it has, no opposition can really keep it back."

It was with feelings considerably excited that Mildred entered the hall where the meeting was to be held—the first meeting of the kind at which she had ever been present. Nor could she repress a smile as she pictured what would be the horror of her sisters could they know how she was spending that evening. But though Mildred was ready to laugh at the prejudices of others, her own expectations were very vague. She had seen caricatures of strong-minded women; she had read adverse criticisms in certain Conservative organs which were esteemed in her set; and she had an idea that a woman who took prominent part in a political movement must be, to say the least, masculine in manner and appearance.

The hall filled but slowly. The movement

was in its infancy, and the question was not sufficiently understood for the public generally to feel much interest in it.

It has been said that a great step has been taken by any class or nation low in the scale when it is rendered dissatisfied with its own condition. Women have continued, up to the present time, apathetic as regards the injustice and inequality of the laws, chiefly because those who do not practically suffer, have a very imperfect idea of what their own legal status really is. There are thousands of educated (?) women at this day in England who have no intelligent comprehension of the law of husband and wife, the laws that relate to married women's property, to divorce, or to a mother's legal relations towards her children.

Public meetings in the early stage of the women's suffrage movement were, in the strictest sense of the word, educational.

There was a faint buzz through the hall as a few persons—half a dozen—entered from a side-door on to the platform. The chair was taken, and the president rose.

"Ladies and Gentlemen,—The object of this meeting, as you are aware, is to support the claims of women to the parliamentary franchise. To some persons this claim may appear altogether new and unheard of; but let me assure

you that, so far from its being a novelty for women who possess the property qualification to vote at elections, it was their very old privilege and right, of which they have been deprived. In the reigns of Queen Elizabeth and her predecessors women voted. It was in the time of the Commonwealth, owing to the influence of the Puritans, that they were first disfranchised. Women are now seeking to recover their ancient right. I shall not detain you to give the reasons why the present movement is deserving of support from all thinking and right-minded persons. The subject will be placed before you far more ably, I have no doubt, than I could place it, by the distinguished lady who is about to favour us with an address. I have the pleasure of introducing Miss Warburton." (Applause, which increased as the lady advanced to the front.)

She was not the least like the caricature which had appeared of her in "Punch," which represented a bony hag, of any conceivable age between fifty and two hundred, clothed in garments which seemed to have been thrown on with a pitchfork. Althea Warburton was very tall, but neither bony nor haggard. In age she might be on the sunny side of thirty. She was quietly, but well and fashionably, dressed in black, which became her fair complexion. Her

blonde hair was drawn off a brow, of which the intellectual organs were nobly developed. She was both a graceful and a dignified-looking woman. Her face was not, perhaps, regularly handsome, yet at moments, from the expression, it was almost beautiful. She regarded unflinchingly the sea of expectant faces, and waited calmly for silence to be restored. Her demeanour could not be called either bold or manlike—it was simply self-possessed.

The lecture was a thoroughly practical one; the language forcible and well chosen, the arguments were all to the point. The laws affecting women were entered into at some length, their injustice and one-sidedness exposed, and the value of a vote as a means of protection clearly pointed out. Occasionally she was interrupted by applause, occasionally by slight attempts at hissing.

On her resuming her seat, discussion was invited, when a thin, dark man started up, and declared, with vehemence, that the demand of political rights for women was monstrous and unscriptural, subversive of our hearths and altars. Nature clearly pointed out that woman was to be subject to man; if we doubted that, we had only to look at savage nations; and it behoved us to be very careful how we were guilty of the profanity of thwarting nature.

Applause, till some one called out, "Nature can take care of herself," which raised a laugh against him.

Several speeches followed, both for and against the movement; the latter being, in one sense, the most remarkable, since the objections ran as follows:

I.—Women do not care for votes, and would not use them.

II.—Women would vote in such numbers as to swamp the male voters.

III.—Women would take their political opinions entirely from their husbands and brothers, so the practical effect would be but to double the votes of certain men.

IV.—Women, by holding, and stiffly maintaining, as they were sure to do, opposite political opinions from their male relations, would introduce dissension into families.

During the debate Miss Warburton sat quietly taking notes, at the conclusion she again rose to answer her opponents. And this speech was even a greater test of her ability than her original address. That, however excellent, might, probably had been prepared at leisure. The answer was impromptu; and the facility with which she gathered up the thread of the whole argument, and the point and logic with which she confuted her opponents, was masterly. On

all present there could have been but one impression, viz., that in precision of reasoning, as well as in grace of delivery, the lady orator bore off the palm. She carried the feeling of the meeting with her; for when a resolution was moved that a petition to both Houses of Parliament should be signed by the chairman on behalf of the meeting, it was carried, though not unanimously, yet with only three or four dissentients.

During the whole proceedings Mildred sat in rapt attention, and the crowd had begun to disperse before she moved. A lady seated next to her asked what she thought of the lecture.

"Oh!" answered Mildred, drawing a long sigh, "she has given me so much subject for thought, I must take it home with me and think it out."

"Ah! I saw you held up your hand for the petition. What do you think of her appearance?"

"I am so surprised," said Mildred, "the newspapers are always abusing and ridiculing her. Plain! she is more nearly beautiful. I wish I could make her acquaintance."

"You have an opportunity now. You have only to go on to the platform and introduce yourself."

"She would think me so forward," said Mildred.

"Not at all; she would be pleased. Good-night," added the lady, as she left her seat, and in a moment disappeared in the crowd.

Mildred stood irresolute for a few seconds, then took courage and went on to the platform.

CHAPTER X.

PIONEERS.

THE result was that she was invited to call on Miss Warburton, of which invitation she lost no time in availing herself. The address given was that of a small house in Kensington. Mildred was received in a room, which was certainly not a conventional drawing-room; it was half study, half office. The table was littered with manuscripts, newspapers, and reviews. On a range of shelves, which occupied one side of the apartment were piles of pamphlets and official-looking papers, which latter, as it proved, included printed forms of petitions to Parliament on various questions.

Miss Warburton was engaged correcting a proof, and, as she greeted her visitor, Mildred felt that her mental measure was being taken, so penetrating were the eyes that read her face.

They conversed on many subjects, social and

political; and by the end of that call, prolonged to nearly two hours, Mildred had learnt that "there are more things in heaven and earth than had been dreamed of in her philosophy."

The acquaintance thus begun ripened fast. Mildred was indebted to Miss Warburton for many agreeable introductions, and she soon had as much, or more, society in her power than she had time to enjoy.

Few things exercise so much influence on a thoughtful young person as to be suddenly thrown into a set where nearly every subject of importance is viewed from a totally different point from that to which she has been accustomed. Such was now Mildred's position. She had been brought up in a set, in which Conservatism, both in politics and religion, was regarded, if not as representative of all the cardinal virtues, at least of a state of things apart from which the cardinal virtues could hardly exist. Of her new friends most were advanced Liberals. On theological questions also they thought for themselves, and few, at least of those who composed Althea's most intimate set, adhered to the Established Church.

It would not have been surprising if Mildred had been repelled by the tone in which certain time-honoured institutions of Church and State were occasionally spoken of in her presence.

But she was not repelled. She saw that, whatever might be the opinions of her new acquaintances, or the merit of those opinions, they were the result of conscientious conviction, and a tide of fresh thought, of fresh life almost, was infused into her own mind. Moreover, these ladies were making far more of their own lives than any women with whom she had previously come in contact. Their days were full of interest; they were conversant with the bearings of all the great political questions of the day; and most of them were doing something to help the practical solution of those social problems—often of so dark and sad an aspect—which have engaged the attention of philanthropists and statesmen from age to age.

Under the stimulus of this society, Mildred's own powers of thought rapidly developed. Her inner life—she was conscious of it herself—seemed to expand and grow, while her views on many subjects, hitherto vaguely formed and loosely held, crystallized into definite shape.

One afternoon, while she was sitting with Miss Warburton, some other ladies being also present, a pretty little girl ran into the room, with a parcel of books under her arm, and a sailor's hat on her fair flowing locks.

"Well, Alice, good marks, I hope?"

"Oh, yes, all right. Aunt, a Greek class is being formed; am I to join it?"

"Not at present, at any rate; you have enough to do. Alice," Miss Warburton explained, "attends a large day-school, which has been started for girls by a company on the co-operative principle. There are a hundred and fifty pupils."

"And you prefer that mode of education to a private school?" Mildred asked.

"Unquestionably. Private schools for girls are set up by women of limited capital, who must make their pupils' interest subservient to economy. The charges are enormously high in proportion to the education that is given. Now this is on a sound commercial basis. The education is a first-class one. The fees for the whole year do not exceed twelve or fifteen pounds, and the shareholders are already receiving a good dividend."

Miss Warburton had been censured for allowing that little girl to go backwards and forwards to her classes alone, but she was indifferent to blame. Alice, she said, had never betrayed the trust reposed in her; people might say what they pleased about her growing bold, and so forth. Fearless the child was, but bold or forward she was not.

Mildred looked with interest at this child,

whose education, she had no doubt, was the subject of many advanced theories. Whatever the training might be, Alice did credit to it; she was blooming, frank, and intelligent.

"Tell me about your classes," said Mildred. "Which of your lessons do you like best?"

"Swimming," was the prompt rejoinder.

One or two of the ladies laughed.

Miss Warburton remarked, "It is to be hoped that more intellectual tastes will develop, and I am not afraid. Let mind and body alike have fair play, and they will grow apace. With regard to swimming, you know it is a most healthy exercise. There is a large open air bath at Alice's school, where the girls learn to swim whenever the weather is warm, and they practise gymnastics instead when it is too cold to bathe."

"What else do you learn?" Mildred asked.

"Oh! all sorts of things," replied Alice, who was leaning against Miss Warburton's knee; "grammar, arithmetic, Latin, German, French, music."

"Well," remarked a lady, who was a coadjutor of Miss Warburton's on a ragged school committee, "I dare say you will grow up a very well-informed woman; still, there are other things which are useful for a girl to know besides grammar, arithmetic, and languages, or even swimming. Can you sew?"

"Yes," replied Alice, languidly, "I have a doll, but I don't care to work for it."

"Too much time is given to needlework in many girls' schools," remarked Miss Warburton, decidedly.

"Every girl, nevertheless, should know how to cut out and make the common articles of clothing," observed the former speaker; "she never can tell when she may require the knowledge. Now, Alice, here is a challenge for you. I'll give you ten shillings when you can show me a frock cut out and made by yourself. I'll supply you with a piece of print."

Alice looked half tempted by the offer.

"There is nothing to prevent Alice making a frock," said Miss Warburton; "she can hem, and fell, and sew."

"I could not cut one out, though," said Alice, honestly.

"You might learn; your aunt's maid, I dare say, could show you. Well, do you accept my challenge?"

"May I?" asked Alice, looking up at Miss Warburton.

"Certainly, if you do it in your play-hours. I cannot allow your lessons to be neglected."

Conversation then turned on the subject of professions for ladies. Miss Warburton thought that every girl, unless she was to inherit an

ample fortune, should be brought up to some definite calling. Not alone with the object of increasing her income, but for the sake of the interest it would give her in life; and she mentioned that she fully intended Alice to enter some profession—what, should be left to her own choice.

"Aunt Althea writes books and newspapers," propounded Alice, "and Miss Randall is a merchant. Do merchants make money, Miss Randall?"

"It is to be hoped so."

"How?"

"They buy goods in great quantities, and ship them to all parts of the world."

"I should like to be a merchant," said Alice.

About this time Mildred's prospects in her own profession began to brighten. Mr. Cook, unsolicited, raised her salary; and, bestowing a few, though cordial, words of approbation, gave her an assurance that, so long as she continued to discharge her duties efficiently, she might reckon on continuing in his office.

CHAPTER XI.

"CRABBED AGE AND YOUTH."

AN October evening, dark and chill. The north-east wind was sharp enough to cut one through, and a gathering bank of heavy whitish cloud on the horizon seemed to indicate an early fall of snow.

As Mildred walked home from the office, hugging herself in her sealskin jacket, she derived material solace from the prospect of the good fire and comfortable dinner which she knew awaited her. Walking tolerably fast, she overtook a decrepid old man, who was tottering along the pavement, which a recent storm of sleet had rendered slippery. Beneath his napless hat was a pinched, blue face, and his thin greatcoat, which had evidently seen service during many a season, could have afforded little protection against the keen blast.

Mildred had, probably, not been hearing very lately any wholesome warnings against indiscriminate alms-giving, or it might be that a contrast was suggested to her mind between the fireside to which she was hastening and his probable appliances for creature comfort, for

she extracted sixpence from her purse, and, as she passed, dropped it into his hand.

A pair of keen gray eyes were lifted for a moment—the gift was evidently unexpected—then a brief "Thank you," and the coin was deposited in his pocket. At the same moment a young man who was passing uttered a suppressed "Ha! ha! that's good."

Mildred took a suspicion that she had made a mistake, but she had no time to dwell upon the thought, for she had proceeded only a few paces when a sudden exclamation made her look round. The old man had fallen on the slippery pavement, and was painfully struggling to regain his footing.

To retrace her steps was the work of an instant. He was not much hurt, but age and infirmity can rarely fall with impunity; he appeared considerably shaken, and it was evident that he was not in a fit state to reach his home without assistance. Mildred volunteered to call a cab.

"No, no," said he, gasping and recovering himself, "a cab—will—cost—a shilling, at least."

"Never mind the fare," said Mildred; "where shall it drive to?"

"I live in the next street; it is not a quarter of a mile from here. I can walk; oh, yes, I can walk."

He was so feeble that Mildred deemed it only an act of charity to keep by his side in case of further accident, and it happened that her route lay in the same direction. The conviction that she had committed a blunder in offering him alms recurred to her mind, for, despite his miserable dress, his tone and manner were those of a gentleman; and the few remarks he offered, as they walked together along the quiet, almost deserted, streets, confirmed her in the impression. The house, too, at which he stopped, though dingy and uninviting, could not be the abode of pauperism. He paused at the door.

"I thank you, young lady," in a tone of formal courtesy; "you have been very kind to an entire stranger, and, in return, I will give you a piece of useful advice. You are addicted to almsgiving——"

The blood flew to Mildred's face.

"Forgive me," said she; "I made a mistake."

"I know you did, you took me for—well, not a beggar, for I did not beg of you, but one to whom a small coin would be a benefaction. No apology is necessary, it was very kind, I take the intention as it was meant. But you are young, you have a long life before you. What may not be achieved in a long life! And I will give you the benefit of some of my experience. Now, mark this. For one fortune that is made

by active means, ten are accumulated by saving. Save your shillings and sixpences, and you may end—as I have done."

Mildred laughed.

"Here is your sixpence," tendering it to her, "lay it by, let it be your nest-egg if you have not one already. What is your name?" he added abruptly.

"Mildred Randall."

"Mrs. or Miss?"

"Miss," replied Mildred, who felt considerably amused.

"So much the better, I am no advocate for matrimony—certain care and uncertain pleasure. I am not married myself, and never intend to be. This is my name," and he handed her a limp card, on which was written, not printed, the name—Mr. Edwin Sutton. "Once more thank you for your kindness, and good-bye; I would ask you to come in, but I have no fire, and only enough dinner for one."

Mildred felt rather diverted by this incident, and entertained little doubt that her strange, new acquaintance was a miser.

His dwelling and hers were within a stone's throw of each other, and frequently after this first meeting she encountered him on her way either to or from the office, on which occasions a friendly recognition was always exchanged;

her slight, good-humoured bow being usually accompanied by a smile which perchance fell like a ray of sunshine across the dreary path of the lonely old man.

As the weather grew colder his face looked more and more pinched and blue, but no change was ever apparent in his garments. One day it happened that Mildred, while turning over a heap of knitted articles which her sister Isabella had sent her to dispose of, came upon a pair of warm muffetees, which had lain a long while on hand. The thin, uncovered wrists of her old neighbour rose to her recollection, and she thought they would be well bestowed on him. Not caring, however, to make any advance to greater intimacy, she put them up in a little parcel, and sent them anonymously by post. That same evening, Mr. Sutton walked into her sitting-room.

"I have come to thank my considerate neighbour for her gift," said he, displaying the muffetees on his wrists. "They are most comfortable. I know they are from you, for you are the only person who for more than twenty years has done me any little acts of kindness."

"May not that be your own fault?" suggested Mildred; "perhaps you do not lay yourself out either to do or to receive little acts of kindness?"

"Perhaps so," said he; "I am a solitary, friendless old man. Yet I am not a churlish old fellow, I assure you. What a good fire you have got."

"Would you like to warm yourself by it? Pray sit down."

"That will be a treat, indeed. But there is a great consumption of coal there, as much as would last me for a week. I am afraid you are lavish and improvident, Miss Randall."

"If by improvident you mean living beyond what I can afford, I certainly am not. But I do not see any reason why I should deny myself the common comforts of life in order to save for a distant day which I may never live to see."

This was not the only evening on which Mr. Sutton benefited by Mildred's fire. He looked in upon her very frequently, after her return from the office, and though it may be a question how far this attention on his part was due to the attraction of the bright blaze, which he enjoyed, though he grudged himself the indulgence, a friendship, of a peculiar sort, sprang up between them.

By degrees, he told her the circumstances of his life, and what had led to the formation of his miserly habits. "I experienced in my youth," said he, "great reverse of fortune. My father possessed wealth, which he lost by im-

prudent speculation. Though I was very young at the time, I recollect the change in our mode of living; the carriage and horses being sold, and our establishment being reduced to two maid-servants. The houses at which I visited when I first grew up were mostly those of men of fortune; they abounded in every comfort that money can procure; all that can charm the eye, and add to enjoyment. I have naturally a taste both for the creature comforts and for the refinements of life. I like a table supplied with costly viands. I like to be surrounded by elegant furniture, and though you may not believe it, I have, or had, an eye for the beautiful in art. I know a good picture when I see it. The contrast between, not to say wealth and poverty, but wealth and moderate competence, impressed itself strongly upon me, and it was on the occasion of one of these visits that I took the resolution to grow rich.

"I had no advantageous start in life, nor had I, I was conscious, the talent for business which enables a man to profit by such opening; besides which, observation taught me that more men are ruined than grow rich by bold speculation. The only means by which I could hope to amass a fortune was by saving; and by laying by annually nearly my whole income, reserving merely enough for the barest subsistence, I

could not fail of accumulating, at length, a large amount.

"I reasoned thus: 'If I spend my whole income it is only a few hundreds a year and will give me nothing beyond the most moderate comfort. Whereas, if I stint myself now, I may one day live handsomely and enjoy myself.' Accordingly I began to save. It is wonderful on how little you can exist. It is also curious how fast money accumulates when laid up at compound interest. Did you ever make any calculations of the kind? The result is interesting. I will show you some if you please."

"Another time," said Mildred, "I am interested at present in your strange story. Pray go on."

"Well, I invested and reinvested carefully, and now and then ventured on some small profitable speculation, when I heard of any very safe. I was five and twenty when I began to save, I now am seventy, and you would be surprised to know how little during all these years my living has cost me. I never spend a penny that is not absolutely necessary. I am now worth upwards of sixty thousand pounds."

"But at what a cost!" exclaimed Mildred, who had listened to this recital with feelings of mingled interest and repugnance; "all the best

years of your life passed as one long penance. It must be poor satisfaction to know that you have so many thousand pounds at your banker's."

"Stay, stay, you misunderstand me," interrupted the old man eagerly. "That was not my object at all. I saved in order to be able to spend one day."

"And if that day has not arrived yet," said Mildred, "when are you to begin to spend?"

"That is true," said the old miser, "but the habit of saving grows on one, I have not now the heart to spend. Habit becomes second nature." A sad and troubled expression came over the withered face. He gazed abstractedly into the fire.

Was his long life passing in review before him, with all its self-imposed privations, undergone for one special end? and now the object of his ambition was attained—"Le jeu ne vaut pas la chandelle."

"I have no object for spending now," said he, at length; "I have lived a life so apart that I have no one to care for, and no one cares for me. All whom I knew in early life are either dead, or have forgotten me."

"Have you no relations?" Mildred asked.

"There is Alured Sutton, my nephew. He has taken to writing to me, and signs himself

my affectionate nephew. I suppose he thinks it worth while to look after his rich old uncle."

"Why attribute such motives to your nephew?" asked Mildred; "believe that he writes to you from kindness and affection."

"You know nothing about Alured Sutton and his motives," said the old man, sharply, "why should you be so ready to defend him?"

"Merely that I think we should judge charitably. When motives are doubtful, give a fellow-creature the benefit of the doubt."

"Well, I just put this question to your common sense," said Mr. Sutton. "Is it likely that a young man, somewhere about seven and twenty, a gay young fellow, can care to keep up acquaintance with an old relation of whom he knows next to nothing apart from interested motives? What can he and I have in common? On the other hand, he is, I suspect, a fast man; it is highly likely he has debt, and my money would be very useful to him. He sent me a box of grouse, last August," continued the old man, with a sarcastic smile, "which he mentioned he had shot in Scotland. I got the poulterer, round the corner, to buy them from me. He gave me three shillings a brace and sold them again for eight. A usurious profit; showed a

greedy, grasping spirit. But the love of gain pervades all classes."

"You would have done better to have kept them and ate them," suggested Mildred, laughing.

"Not at all! Four birds don't go anything like so far as a few pounds of beef or mutton. Not that I eat much of either. I am nearly a vegetarian. But about Alured Sutton," continued he, "he is my nearest—I suppose my only surviving relation, and it would, of course, be natural that he should one day step into my shoes. But if I am right in my supposition that he is a fast man, I would rather build a hospital or a monument than leave the money I have scraped together with labour and self-denial, to be squandered by a spendthrift."

Mildred felt a certain degree of pleasure in the visits of her eccentric neighbour. He would come in with brief greeting, and sit down by the fire, and her easy, unceremonious reception made him feel at home. She never allowed his presence to be an interruption to anything she was about. She made no effort to converse if disinclined, but his conversation was not without interest. Mr. Sutton was a man of some ability, though not of culture, for he had ever grudged the price of books and every means of self-improvement, but in his case it might be said

with a certain degree of truth, that his originality remained the more unimpaired. Many of his views of life were curious and suggestive, and Mildred found that if she did not always agree with him, he often set her thinking.

One evening he remarked abruptly, "You are the only lady with whom I ever formed a friendship. I believe you are the only woman who would welcome me in this neighbourly way without wanting to marry me."

Mildred, quite taken by surprise, burst into a loud laugh, more expressive than complimentary. "I assure you I don't want to marry you," she said.

"I know you don't, I just said so," rejoined he, looking a little piqued. "What should a fine, handsome girl like you——"

"I am not handsome, Mr. Sutton," interrupted Mildred.

"Yes you are, a very fine, blooming girl, indeed, no mate for the like of me. But for all that, I could get a wife if I chose to-morrow, ay, and girls as young and good-looking as you, miss—not for my own sake, mind; don't for a moment suppose I have the imbecile vanity to harbour any such delusion, but for my money's sake. There are women who would marry Old Nick himself if they thought he could settle sixty thousand pounds upon them, and my

years would be in my favour, for the jointure would be so much the nearer."

Mildred, for a moment, looked displeased at these strictures on her sex, but her face then assumed a grave, sad expression. "You are right, Mr. Sutton, there are women—many—who are ready to marry almost any man who has money, but why is this? Because women, as a rule, are so dependent that marriage is not a choice but a necessity. A man, if he has health and energy can always make a competence, but the woman who wishes to earn a livelihood finds that nearly every trade, and still more every profession, is closed against her. There are hundreds of women born and nurtured as ladies to whom life is one long course of dreary privation, and marriage their only chance of rescue."

"Is it so?" asked Mr. Sutton.

"It is indeed;" and Mildred having thus entered on the fertile theme of the wrongs of women, spoke earnestly, even eloquently. She told him of the disadvantages under which women labour for want of parliamentary representation. She spoke of the injustice that had been done them by the misappropriation of educational endowments to the almost exclusive use of men and boys. She told him of the set which is made by trades unions and profes-

sional cliques against every woman who wishes to compete in a remunerative occupation.

"But you have got into a profession, and seem doing well," suggested he.

"I have, but none but myself know the difficulties and repulses I had to encounter. It was by sheer force of will that I at length succeeded."

"That is very sad," said he, "I had no idea of this. A woman should have at least a fair field."

"That is my motto," said Mildred, with animation—"A Fair Field and no Favour."

Mr. Sutton rubbed his shrivelled hands slowly together, and looked into the fire, as was his wont when meditating. "Things ought not so to be," said he, deliberately, "yet there is one fact we must remember: women's work—excuse the observation, there are, of course, exceptions—is generally inferior to that of men."

"Of course it is," said Mildred, "how can it be otherwise while the means of obtaining proficiency are jealously kept from them? Any kind of superficial education is considered good enough for a girl. It is almost impossible to apprentice her to a skilled trade. Men first deny women the opportunity of developing

their powers, and then sneer at their ignorance and incompetence."

She spoke warmly, keenly, because she felt keenly.

Mr. Sutton said, "I should like to help to redress women's wrongs. One can see that almost their first object must be the means of obtaining a really finished education. It would be a great work now to build a college for women; only," and the tone suddenly altered, "all such projects take so much money."

A few evenings after this, when Mr. Sutton looked in on Mildred, he observed, "Odd enough that just after we were speaking the other day about Alured he should have turned up. He has come to London to see me, he says, and intends to stay some time."

"I hope you are pleased with him?" Mildred said.

"What do you mean by pleased? He is what will generally be called, I dare say, a rather fine young fellow. Good looking enough, and well-mannered as the manners of the day go. But he is fast; I see it in his dress; I hear it in his tone, and if he reckons on paying his debts with my money, he will find that he is in the wrong box."

CHAPTER XII.

A WOMAN IN HER "SPHERE."

MEANWHILE, Miss Randall and Miss Georgina were each purchasing that costly article, experience in the lines they had respectively chosen. Mildred often wondered, in the midst of her own occupations, how her sisters fared, and she took advantage of her very first holiday (which occurred when she had been about eight months in the office) to pay a visit to Georgina.

At the station whence she started, there was a great crowd, and she had difficulty in reaching the booking-office. As she was waiting her turn, a voice said, "Allow me to take your ticket."

She looked round, and saw the offer proceeded from a young man, an entire stranger to her, of gentlemanly appearance, but who had something fast and roué-like in his air. Mildred had a habit of refusing rather bluntly even polite overtures from strangers of at all doubtful aspect. She answered coldly, "I am obliged to you, but I prefer to take it myself."

The young man drew back instantly; looked annoyed, either with her or with himself, and disappeared in the crowd.

The journey occupied about two hours by rail, and was marked to Mildred by a pleasant little incident.

She usually saved her money by travelling second class, but on this occasion, wishing to keep up appearances for the sake of her sister, she took a first-class ticket. Her companions were two ladylike-looking women. The one who sat opposite to her was very quietly dressed; young, fair, and distingué. The other took charge of her shawls and travelling-bag. After some time had passed in silence, the young lady offered Mildred a thin pamphlet, saying, "Perhaps you would like to look at this?"

Mildred accepted it, and saw with amusement, that it was Miss Warburton's last lecture on Women's Suffrage.

"I never like to miss an opportunity," continued the young lady, "of drawing attention to this question, for it is impossible to over-rate its importance. Some people say that women are represented already through their male relations, but it is easy to prove the fallacy of that supposition; we have only to consider the inequality of the marriage laws; the difficulty women have in obtaining a thorough education, or their exclusion from nearly all remunerative occupation, to see how much

women suffer for want of direct representation."

Mildred listened with a smile to these remarks, which fell familiar on her ear as household words, and she thought with pleasure how undoubtedly the question is gaining ground; you meet with adherents to the cause in the most unexpected manner, and in every direction. Between persons who think alike there is generally very ready rapport. Mildred sometimes found that the expression of her opinions raised a barrier between herself and others. Many a new acquaintance drew back when he or she discovered that she went in for "Women's Rights." It was pleasant, therefore, to be in contact with a congenial mind, even though the acquaintance was a mere passing one during a short railway journey. The young lady drew off her gloves to write the title of a book she recommended, when Mildred observed a wedding circlet surmounted by several brilliant rings.

"Ah," thought she, "you may have everything this world can give of wealth and luxury, yet a bad husband. That probably is the secret of your being so sensitive to the wrongs of women."

As they stopped at a station, the lady said, with a smile, "Good-morning, I am very glad you are a worker for the cause. Pray keep that

pamphlet, and give it away where you think it may be of use."

A footman, in livery, came up to the carriage, and Mildred observed a coronet on his buttons.

"His lordship is on the platform, my lady," and the next instant a young man came quickly forward, "Oh, here you are," said he, as he looked into the carriage, and the bright smile that accompanied the greeting of the young husband and wife showed Mildred that part of her conjecture, at all events, had been mistaken.

As the train carried her on towards her own destination, she thought, "It is often asserted that the advocates of women's rights are those only who are discontented and disappointed themselves. But what really makes one woman, and not another, take up the subject, is a difference, not of circumstances, but of character. The woman, be she young or old, rich or poor, of an enlarged and generous mind, looks beyond the narrow circle of her own experience, and understands that wrongs may exist which she does not feel. As that young lady, happy, evidently, in the love of her husband, and with beauty and station, exerts herself to help those who are less fortunately situated than herself."

The next occasion on which Mildred saw this young peeress, she was presiding at a women's

suffrage meeting, when Mildred, herself, made her debût as a public speaker.

The house in which Georgina Randall was governess, proved to be a handsome villa, with ample grounds, and everything denoted a liberal though not ostentatious establishment. Mildred was conducted at once to the school-room ; a well-sized, comfortably furnished apartment in the upper storey. There she found Georgina and her two pupils ; children of ten and eleven years of age, who, it being a half-holiday, had finished their lessons, and to Mildred's relief, speedily took themselves out of the way.

Georgina warmly welcomed her sister, and declared that it was a refreshment to her to see again a familiar face. She looked as if she needed some refreshment, for it struck Mildred that she was spiritless, if not depressed.

"I am well enough," she said, in answer to her sister's inquiry, "but my life, you know, is not particularly lively. One is the better for a little society beyond that of children. No variety, day after day, from their lessons, and walks, and plays, is irksome."

"Do you not join the family at all?" asked Mildred.

"We dine at Mrs. Thorn's luncheon, and I spend the evening in the drawing-room, after the children are in bed. But still, you know, I am

the governess. Everybody is perfectly civil, but they would be greatly surprised were I to take much part in conversation.

Mildred remembered that Miss Warburton had once said that a private governess is in a false position; she felt that the remark was just.

"Understand, Mildred," resumed Georgina, "that I do not mean to complain. I have no stories whatever to relate of wanton insults on the part of either the lady or the servants, such as novelists are fond of describing as the portion of their governess heroines. Mrs. Thorn is a well-bred, I believe, kind-hearted woman, but I am a stranger in her family, she knows very little about me. Any disagreeables I have to put up with are inevitable under the circumstances."

A pause ensued. Mildred looked thoughtfully into the fire.

"If that were all," pursued her sister, "I think I might get used to it. But the worst of it is that I feel I am not competent for the part I have undertaken. The children have an uncle who comes here sometimes and has notions about the higher education. He examines them, and complains that they are not well grounded. I was never well grounded myself! But I fully expect, some day, to get a civil dismissal. What shall I do then?"

The sisters enjoyed greatly being together; in

the days when they were always under the same roof they had not valued each other's company nearly so much as now. While they sat before the school-room fire, Georgina's fingers were busily occupied manufacturing a bonnet out of a little tulle, ribbon, and a few simple flowers. When it was nearly finished, she tried it on, and turning round to Mildred, said, "This will do pretty well, I think; I should have paid a guinea at least for it in a shop, and it has cost me just five shillings."

"Beautiful," said Mildred, "suits you exactly. If I were you, I would turn milliner."

"I wish I could, with all my heart. I should be twice as independent, and might make more money."

"I mean really," said Mildred.

Georgina opened her eyes wide, and looked hard at Mildred. "But—a milliner! who ever heard—I should forfeit my position as a lady."

Mildred restrained a little impatient movement with her foot. "What is such position worth compared to the advantages of independence and competence? I have put my pride in my pocket, and never for a moment do I regret having gone into business."

"But the case is different, Mildred; your business is a lady-like, or at any rate, a gentlemanly one."

"Well, I happen to have a turn for that kind of business. But I assure you that I would not have despised any respectable means of bettering my income. I don't mean to say that millinery is a desirable employment for women of our station, far from it, but one can only use the talents one has, and take advantage of the openings that exist. However, I know your opinion," she added, checking herself with a smile, "and I did not come here to 'fight our battles o'er again.'"

Georgina merely sighed, and Mildred had no hope that her words produced any impression.

"How well you are looking, Mildred," her sister remarked, for the second time; "you have cut your hair short, I see."

"Yes, it was too much trouble to dress it in a chignon every morning, as I have to breakfast early to be at the office by ten. Do you like it?"

"It becomes you, I think. I never saw you look so fat and flourishing."

"A contented mind. I am happy, and sleep soundly, that is the secret, I suppose. But now, tell me about Isabella. I long to go and see her, only my time is not my own; she has nearly given me up as a correspondent. You, I dare say, know more of her proceedings than I do."

"Oh yes, writing to each other is the only pleasure Isabella and I have. She is changing her boarding-house again."

"She seems to change very often."

"There is always some disagreeable that prevents her staying. At the first, which you remember promised so much, there was an unpleasant set of ladies. They made cliques among themselves, and the hostess favoured one at the expense of another. Isabella, who only wanted to be on a friendly, civil footing with all, did not like this."

"Of course not."

"Then the next was a smaller establishment, more like a private family, and she expected to be much more comfortable, but they starved her. On Sundays there was no dinner at all, on the pretence of dispensing with cooking."

"But, Isabella should not have stood that," exclaimed Mildred, laughing compassionately; "she paid for seven dinners in the week, and they had no right to cut off one."

"Every one is not so ready to buckle on their armour as you are, my dear Mildred," said Georgina, with a smile, and Mildred smiled too, for she knew she had the reputation of never shrinking from a stand-up fight. "But Isabella did protest, for she used to feel quite faint between breakfast and tea, and the only satis-

faction she got was an impertinent reflection on her appetite."

"Poor Isabella," said Mildred, "who has about the appetite of a sparrow!"

"And now," added Georgina, "I am sure I don't know if this new boarding-house will turn out any better. I am inclined to fear that she will effect only an exchange of evils."

"Well," said Mildred, after she had risen to go, "I wish I saw my way to help you and Isabella." But the fact was, she did not see any way.

Soon after she reached home, she had a call from Mr. Sutton, and accompanying him was the gentleman whom she had snubbed at the railway station in the morning.

"My nephew," said the old man, "requested me to introduce him to you. He thinks he owes you an apology; but he will tell his own story."

Alured Sutton bowed, with not a bad grace, as he said, "Miss Randall remembers me, no doubt, as the man who must have appeared to her so forward this morning; but my excuse is that I knew you, Miss Randall, by sight, as my uncle once pointed you out to me; and it did not at the moment occur to me that I was unknown to you; I thought only that the crowd must be disagreeable for a lady."

Thus Mildred became acquainted with the miser's nephew.

CHAPTER XIII.

POPPING THE QUESTION.

ALURED SUTTON bestowed much dutiful attention on his uncle, but he did not limit himself to his society in London. He was to be met at various West-end parties, where he was well received as the nephew and heir, by his own showing, of a very rich and eccentric old gentleman.

His efforts, however, to commend himself to the good graces of the said relative were often a signal failure. Thus, on one occasion, when the old man was speaking of the slow process by which his savings had accumulated, his nephew thought he was really taking him up in his own line when he said—

"There are easier ways of making money than by starving and screwing. I made five hundred pounds once by a bet on a race. That was a quicker process than yours."

The old man looked up sharply, and his thin lip curled sarcastically, as he asked—

"And I suppose money is never lost by the same quick process?"

Alured saw that he had, as he himself phrased it, "put his foot in it."

"What a queer old fish my uncle is. I wonder whether you or I are to be his heir, Miss Randall?"

This remark Alured Sutton made on the occasion of his third meeting with Mildred. He had called upon her, as we have seen, with his uncle; he repeated the visit alone, within a few days, on the excuse of bringing her some trifling piece of information she desired to obtain, when he sat a good while; and he next encountered her one afternoon in the street, and joined her as she walked towards Mr. Cook's office.

Mildred's impulse was to reply, "I do not believe that either you or I are to be his heir!" but before the words were uttered, she felt that they might bear an unfavourable construction, and she answered, "I have no claim on him whatever, nor the slightest wish to possess any portion of his money. You seem to be his nearest relation, and are therefore his natural heir."

"Of course I ought to be his heir; it will be a case of gross injustice if I am not," was the reply; "and I am sure I victimize myself enough. Fancy my dining with him the other day."

"Well, I have no doubt you had a very good dinner."

"I did not appreciate it if it was. There was a small bit of skinny mutton, that looked as if it had come off a sheep of a parsimonious disposition, which had grudged its own grass. But àpropos of that dinner, I must tell you a capital joke. He made a half apology for the fare, and said that he could at any rate give me a glass of good wine, for he had half-a-dozen bottles of a famous vintage, which he had got years ago from a poor wretch who had no other means of paying a debt. He had never found the heart to use them, so there they had lain ever since; but now a bottle was produced in my honour. I thought this sounded promising, but with my usual ill-luck, just as he was in the act of applying the corkscrew, I said, 'Wine of that vintage is now very rare. Half a dozen bottles are valuable.' Will you believe it? He stayed his hand, and exclaimed, 'Bless me! I never thought of that. I think we will not draw this bottle. You won't mind, I am sure; water or beer is more wholesome. I'll sell the half dozen to-morrow.' I told this story at the club," added Alured, "with great success."

"And I think," said Mildred, repressing a smile, "that if you go about telling stories to

make your uncle appear ridiculous, you cannot wonder that you do not stand very high in his favour."

Alured looked annoyed, and said hastily, "You will not tell tales against me, Miss Randall?"

"Don't be alarmed," said Mildred, curling her lip.

There was a pause in the conversation, till he resumed—"We were speaking about my uncle's intention with regard to his property. I think, Miss Randall, that the best thing you and I could do would be to club our chances."

"How?" asked Mildred.

"Enter into a partnership. Could you—will you—in short—will you marry me?"

Mildred was utterly taken by surprise. "That would not do at all," she said, curtly.

"You think I am joking? I know I am abrupt," said he, "but I mean what I say. I can't make pretty speeches; but I liked you from the first day I ever saw you. I will make you a good husband if you will have me. I will indeed —Mildred, say 'Yes.'"

"Miss Randall, please," said Mildred, quietly. "You and I can never be on less ceremonious terms. Here we are at Mr. Cook's office, Mr. Sutton. I am a very busy woman, and have no time for nonsense or sentiment."

"Ha! ha!" laughed Alured, constrainedly;

"I was only joking—of course I was only joking. So you are not inclined to club our chances, Miss Randall?"

Mildred knew very well that he had not been joking, and did not think the better of the young man who, to save himself the mortification of seeming to be rejected, could attempt to turn off the affair in this way. Her straightforward honesty revolted from the artifice. The episode, however, was destined to develop—not to the length of a three volume novel—but to furnish another chapter in Mildred's career.

Alured, like most of us, valued and coveted an object in proportion as it was out of his reach. Mildred, as she stood at the door of the office declaring that she was too busy to have any time for "sentiment and nonsense," looked very handsome. Her dark eyes shone brightly, and her complexion was becomingly heightened by a clear carnation flush. Her manner was totally devoid of coquetry in the ordinary acceptation of the term; but there was an air of nonchalance, of careless self-reliance, about her as she uttered her brief, uncompromising refusal, that was equally calculated to pique a man who had even a soupçon of admiration for her.

Alured walked away, annoyed with himself for having spoken; yet he could not refrain from saying, half aloud—

"She is a jolly fine girl, and no mistake, and independent of any expectations she may have from that idiotical old uncle of mine, she is the very wife for a poor devil who has next to nothing. She would always be able to pay her own mess bill, and mine also," with a laugh, "if necessary. Well! never say die. All the better that she is not to be had for the first asking."

When Mildred returned home from the office that evening, she found on her table a beautiful bouquet of hot-house flowers. On questioning her servant, she was told that it had been delivered from a shop without message of any kind. Two days later the offering was repeated, and after the same short interval, a third bouquet graced her table.

She would naturally have attributed them to Alured, but for his parting words, in which he had disclaimed any desire to make up to her. As it was, she felt uncertain, until she observed that the last bouquet had a white ribbon twined round the stalks, fastened by a seal bearing a crest and the motto, "Persevero."

Mildred did not wish this to go on, so she gave orders that if another bouquet was brought it was not to be taken in.

She was not, however, required to take action in the matter. The morning after the third flowery tribute had been sent, she was busily

occupied, as usual, at the office. Seated at her desk, she was intent on a column of figures, when she was surprised by the apparition of her landlady, who handed her a telegram.

"This is marked immediate, ma'am, so I thought I had best bring it here."

Mildred had the uncomfortable feeling which is very common at the sight of an unexpected telegram. She tore open the envelope rather nervously. It was dated from a place with which she had no connection, a few miles out of London; and glancing at the name of the sender, she read, "From Alured Sutton to Miss Randall." Next instant she could hardly restrain a burst of merriment. The message consisted of the words: "Have I any chance?"

The suppressed amusement in Mildred's face perhaps excited some curiosity among the young gentlemen on high stools who watched her open the telegram. In the course of the day she answered her lover in his own fashion by telegraphing back: "Not the slightest."

This original mode of courtship tickled Mildred's fancy. "It saves a great deal of trouble," she thought, as she walked from the telegraph office. In fact it struck her as the most sensible proceeding she had yet witnessed on the part of Alured Sutton. The medium he had chosen proved, however, to have its disadvantage.

It was evening, and the table was laid for Mildred's solitary dinner—solitary but for the company of a handsome water spaniel who shared her daily meals—when a loud knock was heard at the street door, a rapid step ascended the stair, and Mr. Alured Sutton was announced.

He entered with an air of joyous elation, and waited only for the door to be shut, to seize her hand and kiss it.

Mildred drew it abruptly away, and stepping back, said, in no gratified tone, "Mr. Sutton! what do you mean?"

"To express my gratitude for your kind message."

Mildred shrugged her shoulders. "You are grateful for small mercies," said she.

"I am so," he answered. "The *slightest* encouragement was as much as I ventured to hope for."

"But remember my message was, '*Not* the slightest.'"

Alured's countenance changed. His incredulity was evidently unfeigned.

"I cannot have read it wrong," said he, hastily, and he pulled the telegram out of his pocket. There stood the words too plainly, "the slightest." The negative had been omitted.

"Well," said Mildred, "I am sorry, but it was no fault of mine."

Alured looked very much disconcerted indeed.

"I am the most unfortunate man," he exclaimed angrily; "I succeed in nothing. I am heir to my uncle, and he prefers a stranger. I play, and I almost invariably lose. I try to win a nice woman as my wife, and she won't have me."

Mildred laughed. "Don't abuse fate," said she, pacifyingly. "If you play you deserve to lose, and are you sure you deserve a good wife? We make our own destinies in a great measure; that is my creed."

"No, no," interrupted Alured; "the stars in their courses fight against some people."

"I am afraid that I must agree with you," Mildred answered, with a sudden change of tone. "Were I to judge from my own personal experience alone, I should say that by energy and resolution we can shape our lives very nearly as we will. But when I look round on the world, I must own that I see people whose best efforts do seem destined to miscarry. I am forced to be a believer in fate, more or less."

"Then there our sentiments agree," said Alured. "Do you turn me out, Miss Randall?" he added, as Mildred glanced towards the door. "May I not stay a few minutes?"

"Yes, if you will speak on general subjects,

and not revert to the question that brought you here."

She sat down, but after what had passed it was not easy to fall into general conversation. An embarrassed pause followed, which Mildred was the first to break.

"Have you no profession, Mr. Sutton?" she asked.

"Well, no. I had eight thousand pounds to set out with, and I thought I could do without a profession; but it was not enough to live upon properly."

"Then it seems to me," observed Mildred, "that the possession of that eight thousand pounds was your only real misfortune. Had you not had it, you would have been forced to choose a profession, and might have made something of your life, instead of wasting it, as I have a notion you are doing."

"You are right, my life has been wasted; but it is a very hard thing when one once gets off the line to get on to it again."

Though Alured might not be aware of it himself, he was taking at this moment the very best way to enlist Mildred's sympathy in his favour. She knew too well the difficulties and struggles of life not to feel to a certain degree interested by such a confession. Alured thought that her resolution was waver-

ing, so at least he interpreted the expression of her face. He hastened to push his advantage. With magnanimous candour he continued—

"I confess I have not been very steady. I have sown my wild oats. But were I married I would turn over a new leaf. A wife—you at least might do what you liked with me, and you would have the satisfaction of knowing that you had reformed a rake."

But now Alured was off the line indeed.

"And do you presume," Mildred demanded, rising from her seat, while her eyes literally flashed upon him, "to come here and tell me that you have led the life of a rake, and at the same moment ask me, a virtuous woman, to be your wife?"

"Why," said Alured, almost gasping, for the explosion was quite unlooked for on his part, "ladies don't generally object to a man for having been a little wild. I never met with a woman yet who thought the worse of a fellow for having sown his wild oats."

"You have met with one now, I can assure you," said Mildred. Her look and tone were those of withering contempt, and the luckless Alured had nothing to do but to beat an immediate retreat. He felt as though he had been forced into the passage by a whirlwind.

If he attempted any apology, Mildred did not

deign to hear it; but as soon as she was alone her thought was, "There is only too much truth in his excuse that ladies, as a rule, do not discountenance men on account of previous misconduct. Oh, if women would but wake up to their responsibility on this point, and no longer condone the faults of men, society would very soon be purified."

She felt greatly discomposed and ruffled. Her countenance betrayed that her nature had been wrathfully stirred even to its depths, nor did she get over the effects of this scene during the whole evening.

The next time that Alured encountered Mildred, his manner was abrupt, almost rude. His animus had evidently undergone a complete revolution. Sometimes she thought that there was more in his change of manner than pique at her refusal, that he was jealous of her favour with his uncle.

CHAPTER XIV.

ALICE'S SPECULATION.

SUMMER in London, when the trees in the parks burst into leaf, when balconies are filled with flowers, when the shops are full of gay light dresses.

To Miss Warburton, summer brought acceptable rest and leisure. The Bill in which she and her friends were interested, had been before Parliament; as they fully expected, rejected; and for the remainder of the session there was nothing particular to be done on their part. During the past season Althea had read, and written, and thought overmuch; she now stood in need of a holiday. She felt a longing to get to the country; as soon, therefore, as Alice's classes broke up, she removed to a cottage she possessed, about ten miles out of London.

Before they left town, Alice won her wager by producing a frock, the work of her own hands. Many an hour's labour had it cost her, but the conditions were most strictly fulfilled on her part.

Miss Warburton, who was no great friend to the needle as a woman's implement, secretly marvelled at the patience with which her little

niece toiled at the, to her, long hems and seams, and would not have objected had she thrown the whole affair up in disgust. But Alice's steadiness and perseverance in the task she had accepted, was equalled only by her conscientious determination to reject all offers of help, and afforded a good omen for her future character. When, by degrees, the garment began to assume the desired shape, her pride and pleasure were considerable. At length it was completed, and on being submitted to the judge, was pronounced "extremely well, considering," and the ten shillings were cordially awarded her.

To expend those four half-crowns was the next object. But how, was difficult to decide. One day she inclined towards a new album for crests and postage stamps; on the next, to a copy of Hans Andersen's tales; on a third, to some flowers in pots for Aunt Althea. This latter would have been the purchase, but for the discouragement Aunt Althea gave to the proposition. So the money was not spent at all, and she continued to carry it about in her pocket.

Mildred went out to spend a Saturday afternoon with Miss Warburton in the country, one of her own brief holidays, which she enjoyed as only those who habitually work hard can enjoy leisure.

As she walked from the railway station down a rural lane, she met Alice, mounted on a Shetland pony, trotting along in very independent fashion. Country air and holidays agreed mightily with Alice, who, with her rosy sunburnt face, surmounted by a sailor's hat, her sunny hair floating in the breeze, and her fearless bearing, was a picture it did one good to look at.

She pulled up her pony with a jerk, and Mildred stopped to speak to her.

"What a charming pony," caressing the thick mane; "where did you get him?"

"He is my very own," said Alice, proudly, "a gentleman made me a present of him, and Aunt Althea says he shall come with us to Kensington."

"Was there ever such a fortunate child! I wish I had a pony to trot about upon. Suppose you sell him to me, Alice?"

Alice set her white teeth firmly together, and shook her head emphatically.

Mildred was fond of Alice, but her friendship was shown a good deal by teasing her; so now she pretended to want to buy the pony. "Look here, I'll give you a sovereign for him. Here it is. Let us strike the bargain at once."

She opened her portemonnaie, and produced a piece of gold, on which Alice, who seemed to think this was becoming over-serious, leaned

forward, and clasped the pony's neck, declaring she would not sell him, even for a whole sovereign, then hitting him with her switch, she set off at a gallop. Mildred looked after the happy child till she was out of sight, then proceeded to pay her visit.

She found Miss Warburton in a picturesque two-storied cottage, the porch of which was filled with geraniums and fuchsias; French windows opening out on a little lawn, and a landscape around, consisting of orchards and farmyards.

For the sake of returning fresh to her work, Miss Warburton was determined to shake off as much as possible all thought of politics, and let her mind, which, too much, was kept on the stretch, relax, and turn to other subjects. She had tastes and talents for many things besides the political rôle she had adopted. This summer she took to practical gardening, greatly to the benefit of both body and mind.

Mildred never tired of talking to Miss Warburton, their two minds chimed in harmony, and this afternoon she sat on a low seat at the open window, looking out over the garden, brilliant with flowers; a cup of tea and plate of bread and butter beside her, enjoying, to the utmost, a long discussive talk. Time passed only too quickly, when suddenly, a light dancing step was heard

on the gravel, accompanied by a man's heavy tread, and they caught the words, pronounced in peremptory, childish tones.

"You must carry it round for me to the back; no, put it down here, and I will give you the sixpence I promised."

At the same moment, a singular squeaking noise greeted the ladies' ears. They both looked out, and perceived Alice, accompanied by a rustic youth, apparently a farm labourer, who was carrying a sack, in which were evident indications of animal life.

"What is this?" demanded Miss Warburton.

Alice was so intent on her business that she made no reply, until she had signified to the boy the spot on which she wished his burden deposited, opposite the open window, then she said, carelessly, "A pig."

"A pig!" repeated Miss Warburton,—"stop!" to the boy; "there is some mistake here, I have ordered no pig."

"All right," said Alice, confidently, "he is mine, I have bought him, aunt. I'll tell you all about it directly, only just let me pay this man for carrying him."

"But it is not all right," interposed Miss Warburton, "you have bought a pig! What can you mean?"

"I assure you it is all right," exclaimed Alice,

deprecatingly, "I have paid for him with my own money." And while Miss Warburton stood in silent mystification, Alice, who exhibited throughout the scene remarkable self-possession, put sixpence into the boy's hand, for which he pulled the front of his cap, and told him he might take his departure. Then, having got the matter so far arranged, she condescended to tell her story.

It appeared that in the course of her ride, the pony, without consulting his mistress's wishes, had carried her into a farm-yard, attracted by a trough of water. There she saw a litter of young pigs, and she overheard the farmer's wife say that there were more than she could keep, though she grudged selling them while they were so small, as she could get only ten shillings apiece for them, whereas, in a few months' time, they would fetch three pounds each; "and so," continued Alice, "I offered her my ten shillings, and," triumphantly, "by-and-by I will sell my pig for three pounds!"

Mildred burst into a hearty laugh, she enjoyed the notion of Alice's speculation; but Miss Warburton did not laugh.

"And how do you intend to feed your pig?" she asked.

"Oh! there are plenty of scraps in the kitchen. He can have them."

"Those scraps," said Miss Warburton, "are not yours to dispose of. They belong to me, and to the cook. You will find, my dear child, that you have reckoned without your host in buying that pig, Alice."

Alice looked a little disconcerted, but expedients did not fail her. "He shall have half my bread and milk."

"Half, or the whole of your bread and milk would not nearly satisfy a pig," said Miss Warburton, doing her best to suppress a smile; "nor can I allow you to starve yourself."

"I—I," said poor Alice, "will sell some of my frocks."

"If you sell your frocks, I shall only have to buy you others, so the pig would really be kept at my expense."

"I wanted to be a merchant," said Alice, in despair, "and I thought it would be a good beginning, to buy a pig and sell it for more than I gave. Miss Randall told me——"

"Child of the day," interrupted Mildred, "what will you come to? But do not make me responsible for this."

"But now, what is to be done?" resumed Miss Warburton; "must the pig be sent away?"

Poor Alice looked ready to cry. "If I had

any more money," said she, "I would buy food for him, but I have none."

"Well, what do you say to this arrangement?" said Miss Warburton. "If I give you food for your pig will you promise to repay me when you sell him?"

"Oh, that will do capitally!" exclaimed Alice, her face brightening.

"But remember I shall hold you to the bargain; I shall expect you really to pay your debt."

"Yes, I will, indeed," said Alice, earnestly, and she ran away to see about accommodation for her pig.

"Poor Alice," Miss Warburton remarked with a smile as the door closed. "Her speculation is rather inconvenient, but I don't much mind, for I do think the child has shown a good deal of character."

"So very much character," answered Mildred, "that I shall be astonished if that young lady does not prove a handful."

"You are mistaken there, I think," remarked Miss Warburton; "the children who are deficient in character are the most difficult to train. Alice is very tractable, if you treat her like an intelligent being. I give her on principle a good deal of liberty, and she very rarely abuses my confidence."

This led them to speak of education.

"The spirit of independence," remarked Miss Warburton, "should be encouraged, not suppressed, in girls. Sometimes I tell Alice that while she is a child, she has neither judgment nor knowledge of the world sufficient to guide herself; therefore when we happen to differ, she must submit to my judgment. But as soon as she is able to think correctly herself, I shall no longer wish to exercise any authority over her. I believe that if parents would more readily recognize the right of their grown-up daughters to think and act for themselves there would be more real confidence between parents and children than exists."

"There are one or two questions I have often wanted to ask you about Alice's education," observed Mildred. "What do you teach her as regards religion?"

Miss Warburton did not immediately answer, but looked thoughtfully out of the window.

"My great object," she said, "at present, is to keep her mind free from dogma. Then when her intellect is matured, she will bring an unbiassed mind to the consideration of the evidences for and against revealed religion, and work out a belief for herself."

"The very thing orthodox teachers warn us against," said Mildred, half-laughing. "Argu-

ments are presented to us as evidences of the truth of certain doctrines, and we are told not to read what can be said on the other side. I have heard the spirit of free inquiry denounced from the pulpit scores of times."

"You may believe, nevertheless," remarked Althea, "that as Tennyson says, 'There is more faith in honest doubt than in half the creeds.'"

"I am sure of that," answered Mildred, earnestly; "once I scandalized a clergyman and a whole tea-party by proposing to get Bishop Colenso's books into our little country library. But in spite of all that my friends say, I do feel that every intelligent man or woman is not only justified, but called upon to examine the evidences of the religion they have been taught."

"What do you mean by that?" asked Miss Warburton. "Many church people talk about examining the evidences of religion, when all they mean is, that they wish to be strengthened in foregone conclusions—to be furnished with arguments in favour of orthodoxy."

"That is not what I mean," said Mildred. "I wish to seek the truth."

"Think well what that involves. Truth is still at the bottom of the well, and those who desire to see her brought to light get very hard

names for their pains. If you are once suspected of being really sceptical, many of your best friends will look coldly at you. It will be a social disadvantage to you."

"Don't you think that is an expediency argument?" said Mildred.

"Well, I will use another: are you prepared to follow Truth wheresoever it may lead? Suppose that the result of your search, instead of confirming all that you have been taught, were to disprove much that you have been accustomed to hold sacred?"

"That," said Mildred, slowly and gravely, "I should feel very painful. For there are doctrines I do cling to. My sisters think me irreligious, but I know I am not—yet even supposing, which surely is not possible, that honest, unprejudiced investigation must land one in the dreary region of atheism, still Truth is the only thing that is worth holding."

Miss Warburton looked with interest at Mildred. "You are right," she said, "Truth alone is valuable, and it is worth paying dear for. What else is the meaning of the parable of the Pearl of great price?"

She rose and went to a cabinet at the other end of the room. "As you wish to enter on that ground, I will lend you some books that will help you."

She returned to her seat with a number of pamphlets which she turned over, commenting on those she selected and gave to Mildred. "These are published," said she, "for the express object of aiding free inquiry, but don't accept blindly any opinion you find there, or that I express to you. Think for yourself."

Mildred was struck, as well she might be, by the difference in the tone of her old and of her new guides.

The reiterated warning of orthodox teachers is, "Don't attempt to examine too much. Believe what you have been taught. To doubt, to question, is to yield to a temptation of the devil." Here this freethinker said, "Take nothing on my authority, or on the authority of the books I give you. Think for yourself."

"Well," said Miss Warburton, smiling as she put the pamphlets into Mildred's hands, "here is heresy enough for you in the meantime. If you like to pursue the subject, I can supply you with plenty more literature of the same kind."

Mildred now looked at her watch, and saw that she had run her time for catching the train rather close. So she put on her hat, kissed Miss Warburton, for whom she felt a growing and warm affection, then hurried off.

Alice was on the lawn, knocking about croquet

balls, and called out as she passed—"Come and have a game, Miss Randall."

"Not to-day, my chickie, I shall be late for the train."

CHAPTER XV.

SHIFTING SANDS.

THIS book being neither controversial nor theological, we shall only say with regard to Mildred's new studies, that the effect of those pamphlets, and of various conversations with Miss Warburton, was to shake her belief to its very foundations. But change does not necessarily imply destruction. On the ruins of one fallen temple a new edifice may be reared, nobler and more enduring than that which was overthrown. We do not mean to imply that any such fair structure was in Mildred's case rebuilt at once on the ruins of the old. There is with most people whose religious opinions are progressive, a time of transition, when old things have passed, or are passing away, but the new heavens and the new earth have not yet appeared. This state of feeling must be attended with more or less discomfort. Mildred discovered that many of the doctrines taught

by the Church of England, and which she had for long accepted with implicit credence, are utterly untenable, that they are confuted alike by science and reason. Nevertheless, she was at times startled to find how far she was drifting from the faith in which she had been educated, and now and then she was disturbed by a misgiving as to the lawfulness of her present studies. This feeling came to a climax one Saturday afternoon when in the course of a long walk she happened to stroll into a cemetery on the outskirts of London.

It was a quiet, cheerful spot, in which there was nothing to present the gloomy aspect of death; calmness and repose were its characteristics. The graves were neatly kept, and texts engraven on the stones pointed to the Resurrection and the Life. The sky was blue and bright. High in the air a lark was singing. As Mildred loitered in the sunshine, grave but not sad, she felt that the passing beauty of earth must have its antitype somewhere, even in that unseen and eternal world, which she, in her materialism, was sometimes in danger of forgetting.

It is impossible to account for the different moods of the mind; but, that afternoon, Mildred's feelings were attuned to a different key from usual. The concerns of this world, and

all those objects which she had lately been pursuing, seemed insignificant in her eyes. She paused before a tombstone, on which a fading wreath of amaranth was hung, and read the text—"A building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."

"If it is true," she said to herself—"and I think it is—that this life is but the prelude to another which is to last for ever, then our highest wisdom must be to prepare for that. It is, after all, a matter of very little moment what we are here, except in reference to the future. What will it signify to me," as she thought of her recent studies, her doubts and questionings, which she had encouraged rather than suppressed, "in the course of a very few years whether I have been more or less *advanced*, if science is to lead me astray from God?"

And, for a moment, Mildred almost resolved to return to the bosom of the church she had forsaken, and never again to open a book whose tendency was to lead her away from a simple faith in orthodox Christianity.

But next moment another thought arose.

"Can it be displeasing to God that His creatures seek to know what really is religious truth? Is it unlawful to use the intellect He has given me to judge whether, in what I have been taught to believe on the most important of

all subjects, I have been taught aright? And how can I judge if I do not investigate? No, I do not believe that free inquiry is sinful. In that case, had I been born a Jew, I must have remained a Jew; if a Mahometan, I must have remained a Mahometan. It would have been my duty to stifle every desire for investigation from the fear of being impious. I know, myself, that I am actuated by no scoffing spirit. God, if He sees my heart, knows this; and, instead of giving up the search, I will rather pray that He Himself will guide me in it, through present mists, and possibly greater darkness, to the eternal light which, I cannot doubt, lies beyond; and I will go fearlessly, though reverently, on my way."

CHAPTER XVI.

THERE ARE WOMEN AND WOMEN.

WHILE the fierce competition for the very means of subsistence makes life so hard a struggle for thousands of women, there are others by whom such struggles can hardly be realized, so remote is the possibility that poverty—the need to toil—could ever enter their homes.

Look into that fine drawing-room—the house

is that of Henry Herne, M.P. for Shaddon. The air is scented, though not heavily, by the breath of choice flowers—so costly an indulgence at the commencement of the London season. The ornamental objects scattered about is each a gem in itself. The tables are strewn with attractive-looking publications of the day. A lady is lounging on a sofa, with a piece of delicate work in her hand; her dress is tasteful, and finished in every detail.

Mrs. Herne was spending the afternoon quietly at home. The piece of pretty embroidery that occupied her fingers was intended for the use of one of her children, the youngest of whom, a baby boy, was playing on the carpet at her feet. She looked a handsome, domestic young matron, whose placid thoughts were, for the time, divided between her needlework and her child. In spite of these tranquil surroundings, trouble was near at hand. A low open carriage, drawn by two mites of ponies—the whole set-out fit for a fairy queen—driven by a lady, stopped at the door. The lady alighted and sent up her card. This card Mrs. Herne regarded with evident astonishment. The inscription thereon was "Rosaline Harvey"—not Miss Rosaline Harvey—simply the name.

But it was not this little peculiarity—chiefly, at all events—that occasioned the expression of

inquiring surprise on Mrs. Herne's face; nor was it even the fact that the owner of that melodious name was no visiting acquaintance of hers; but Rosaline Harvey had been pretty often before the public of late as a writer of sensational fiction. Her name figured on the title-page of various novels of not the choicest description. What, Mrs. Herne felt inclined to ask, brought this lady to call on her?

The inquiry merely glanced through her mind, for the footman was speedily followed into the room by Miss Harvey in propriâ personâ; and if the fashion of her visiting card was peculiar, her own appearance was much more so. Such a toilette! Her hair was yellow auburn, of a shade that did not harmonize with either her complexion or eyebrows, and gave at once the idea that it was not nature's hue. It was curled over her shoulders. She wore a clear white muslin skirt, looped up over a crimson satin petticoat; boots, with large crimson rosettes, and the highest of heels, which were gilt. She carried a slender gold-headed cane. On her shoulders a small black lace mantle, sufficiently transparent to display a fancifully-made crimson jacket. On her head a tiny black hat, with a small white plume fastened by a sparkling ornament.

Mrs. Herne rose as the lady advanced, but was so surprised that she felt absolutely incapable, for a moment, of speaking. She waited for her visitor to announce her own business. The duty of taking the initiative was, however, left in perfectly competent hands. Miss Harvey addressed the wife of the member for Shaddon with easy nonchalance.

"How do you do, Mrs. Herne? I sent in my card, and I dare say my name is not unknown to you?"

Mrs. Herne admitted that she knew the name as that of a writer of fiction.

"So I suppose, most people do, who read at all. Are you literary, Mrs. Herne?"

Leonora felt strongly tempted to say that her acquaintance with Miss Harvey's contributions to literature consisted of having dipped into one or two novels, sent, unsolicited, by Mudie, and closing them again. But the fair authoress did not wait for, or seem to expect an answer.

"So I thought," she resumed, "it would be sufficient to send in my card. When people attain a certain degree of celebrity, they do not require much introduction, do they?"

The two ladies stood confronting each other, for Mrs. Herne felt a strong disinclination to invite her visitor to be seated. She, perhaps, made the slightest movement of her hand towards

a sofa; but be that as it may, Miss Harvey, at this juncture, again took the initiative by establishing herself in a corner of the nearest couch. There was, therefore, nothing left for the lady of the house but to accept her fate with the best grace she could, and be seated likewise.

"May I know to what I owe this honour?" Leonora began, coldly.

"Oh, yes, certainly—my call is not, properly speaking, to you, Mrs. Herne. I came to see Henry."

"Who?" asked Mrs. Herne, her fine eyes opening to their widest extent.

"Henry Herne—your husband, but I was told he is out, so I thought you might do as well."

"Mr. Herne—my husband," emphatically, "is out, but if you have any business with him I will deliver a message."

"Well, my business just now was to call him over the coals for some things he said against women in his speech the other night."

"I do not understand. To what do you allude?" asked Mrs. Herne.

"He voted in the House of Commons on Tuesday night," Miss Harvey explained, impatiently, "against the Bill for giving political rights to women. He spoke against it, too, and they say the ladies who were in the 'cage' listening to the debate were very angry, for that his

speech was more damaging to their cause than any other that was made that night."

"Oh," said Mrs. Herne, "then am I to understand that you are one of the women's rights party?"

Miss Harvey tossed back her head, and an angry flush, for which Mrs. Herne could not at the moment account, was visible, even through the paint, which was sufficiently perceptible on her cheeks. "I am neither one of them nor have I any wish to be one of them, further than that I want my rights as much as they do. I don't belong to their Association. I stand on my own ground, independent of committees and societies."

This was said in a decidedly spiteful tone; then she added, "Will you believe it? I offered to lecture for them once, and the fools refused. They were great asses for their pains, for I would have drawn a larger audience than even their crack lecturer, Miss Althea Warburton."

Mrs. Herne smiled. Miss Harvey asked abruptly, "Do you go in for women's suffrage, Mrs. Herne?"

"I have not heard much about the movement," was the reply, gravely, "but I think that the laws are in some respects very one-sided—very unfair towards women, and ought to be amended."

"You may say that! Now, here is a case. I

make a good deal by writing. I write fiction by the yard, and the publishers always buy my MSS. Sometimes they even advance me money on what I am going to write, they know so well that I hit the public taste. Well, a pretty thing it would be if I chose to marry, and a husband could make away with the fruit of my brains."

"But I thought," said Mrs. Herne, interested in spite of her repugnance to the speaker, "that an Act was very lately passed, that puts all that right."

"Don't you believe it, that 'Married Women's Property Act' is the greatest humbug going. The measure, as it passed the House of Commons, was a very fair one; not perfect, by any means, but good so far as it went. But the Lords made such a mull with their amendments, that now there is no making head or tail of it."

"But I thought," said Mrs. Herne, "that this new Act does bonâ fide secure to a married woman her own earnings, whether they be by the toil of her brain or of her hands."

"But, don't you see," said Miss Harvey, eagerly, "that so long as a married woman cannot be sued, she is virtually prevented from trading, since who will give her credit? Take an instance. I engage, say, with a publisher, to write a serial, for which he pays me down five hundred pounds. I may fail to perform my part of the bargain,

and were I a married woman I could not be sued, so he would have no redress."

"I see," assented Mrs. Herne, thoughtfully.

"And for that reason," continued Miss Harvey, whose lips, it must be owned, uttered words of wisdom which might not have been expected from her fantastic appearance, "I want the suffrage. Depend upon it, women will never get justice until they have direct representation."

"I dare say it may be so," answered Mrs. Herne.

"Then, if you think so," said her companion, "why did you not make your husband vote in favour of the Bill the other night?"

"Mr. Herne has his own views," said his wife, hesitating; "I believe he does not approve of women meddling with politics."

"I dare say not, and I know that wives have often very little influence. I should not wonder, now, if I can make more of Herne than you can. I am rather popular with men—more so than with women."

It would be difficult to describe the sensations that Mrs. Herne was experiencing; and the worst of it was, she felt so impotent. She wanted to be cold and dignified, to petrify the audacious creature at her side; but somehow it

was difficult in the face of the perfect nonchalance of the other.

"The woman is absolutely brazen," she thought.

As conversation flagged, Miss Harvey leaned back among the sofa cushions, stuck out her boot, and struck the gilded heel carelessly with her cane.

"I know Herne very well," she resumed; "he comes and dines with me. No, don't look shocked," as Mrs. Herne involuntarily gasped—

"Surely not!"

"I have an aged relative who lives with me —a—a grandmother, who does propriety on these occasions. Well, then," rising, "you'll give Herne my message? Tell him, please, that I want him to dine with me to-morrow (Sunday), that I may roast him about his vote. Tell him that Sir Alfred is coming.'

"Sir Alfred who?" Mrs. Herne interrupted freezingly.

"Oh! Herne will know. A mutual friend of his and mine. He will understand if you give my message. Oh! and tell him that I have a new Hungarian wine on which I want his opinion; and I want to hear what he thinks of a new dress I shall put on for his special benefit. I don't ask you, Mrs. Herne, for I know you would not enjoy my little party—you would feel

like a fish out of water; but if you like to look in some afternoon about five o'clock, and take a cup of tea with me, I shall be very glad."

It is the last drop makes the cup overflow. Mrs. Herne's indignation would no longer brook control. Her eyes flashed, as she said—

"Thank you, but it is not likely that I shall be able to do so;" and, without further parley, she rang the bell.

No sooner was she alone than the look of proud defiance faded from her face. It was some minutes before she moved from the spot where she was standing. Her whole figure seemed to droop; she wrung her hands, and her brow contracted from inward pain.

The first sound that roused her was the voice of her child, who, resenting being so long neglected, appealed loudly for mamma. Mrs. Herne lifted him in her arms, and tried to speak playfully. But her words were strangely at variance with her flushed cheeks and swimming eyes. It would not do. Even her baby could not at that moment engage her thoughts. After a brief attempt to play with him she replaced him on the carpet among his toys, threw herself on to a seat, and covered her face with her hands. The heroic mood had vanished, the woman's feelings alone remained, and she wept bitterly.

The sound of a step on the stairs made her

start. She dashed her handkerchief across her eyes, and mechanically turned to the mirror to recompose her features. By a great exercise of self-command she succeeded in assuming an air of indifference as Mr. Herne entered. His eye was quick, if not kind; he merely glanced at her, and said abruptly—

"You have been crying. What is the matter?"

Mrs. Herne attempted no evasion. She took up the card from the table, and handed it to her husband with the comment—

"The most horrible woman has been here, Henry."

Mr. Herne read the name with evident surprise and annoyance.

"What the deuce," he asked, "brought her here?"

"She came to insult me," was the reply, "to inform me that she had more influence with my husband than I possess."

"That was not the ostensible object of her call, I presume," said Mr. Herne, frowning.

"She had the impudence to say," resumed Mrs. Herne, "that she came to see you, and she declared that you dine with her. Oh! Henry, surely that is not true?"

Mr. Herne looked down on the carpet, and bit his lip. The attack, it was evident, took

him by surprise, and was as unwelcome as it was unexpected. For a moment he seemed undecided what tone to assume. Then he said, savagely—

"If I have dined with her, what concern is that of yours?"

"I think I may say it is my special concern," answered the offended wife, the hope to which she had been clinging unconsciously, that the claim of the fast woman to her husband's acquaintance was an empty boast, being thus dashed to the ground.

"Come, Leonora," said he, with an awkward mixture in his tone of defiance and would-be persuasiveness, "there is nothing to make a scene about. Why in the world should I not dine with this lady? Rosal—Miss Harvey—may be a little fast, but there is no harm in her; she is a very clever woman, and a celebrated authoress."

"An enviable celebrity!" retorted Mrs. Herne, curling her lip contemptuously; "her writings are trash, and very wicked trash. It says little for the taste of the day, when publishers find it worth their while to pay for such rubbish."

"But what brought her here? You have not told me that yet," repeated Mr. Herne, impatiently.

Leonora hesitated for an instant; but what was the use of suppressing a message, even were

she not too straightforward to do so? She answered—

"She was annoyed at your having voted against some Bill the other night."

He interrupted, "Much she cares how I voted on that Bill; much she cares for politics."

"Well, I don't know; I understood that she did care. She said she once offered to lecture for the Ladies' Association, and they seem to have ignominiously rejected her services. Anyhow, she declared that she wanted to 'roast' you, as she expressed it, about your speech; and she had the impudence to request you would dine with her to-morrow. A Sunday party, too! I give her message because I promised; but, oh! Henry, tell me that you will not accept her invitation—say that you will never go near her again!"

"I shall bind myself to nothing of the kind," was the reply, fiercely. "A pretty thing, indeed, if I am to be tied to my wife's apron-strings! I may, or I may not go—that is my affair."

Mrs. Herne was again weeping bitterly. Mortification, grief—but we need not waste words to explain her feelings.

"Leonora," said her husband, impatiently, "(hang that woman for coming here), don't be absurd. You are making a great fuss about nothing. If I choose to dine with Miss Harvey, it is because she gives uncommonly good din-

ners and capital wine, which is not always the case where a lady is the entertainer. She herself is amusing, she is lively, she is handsome—"

"That I am sure she is not," interrupted Mrs. Herne, energetically. "What taste the man must have who can call her handsome! With her dyed hair and her paint—I thought her hideous!"

"Envy," said Mr. Herne, emphatically. "Oh, woman! woman!"

Mrs. Herne was not one of your meek women; she was a woman of noble mind, and capable of true, earnest affection. To a husband worthy of her she would have been devoted in life and in death; but, as often is the case with the finest natures, her feelings were impetuous; she could show, on occasion, a righteous indignation, and such it was that stirred her now.

"Well, Henry," and her proud eyes flashed, "I tell you I will not stand this. I have ever been a faithful and true wife, as you know full well, and I owe it to myself, to my children, to society, not to condone an offence of this nature."

"And what do you propose to do?" asked Mr. Herne, sarcastically. "Have you the means to set up an independent establishment if you quit my roof?"

"I can sue for a separate maintenance," was the reply, resolutely; "and if this acquaintance

continues I shall do so. I will sue for a divorce, Henry, sooner than submit to outrage and insult."

"Are you aware," asked Mr. Herne, deliberately, "that even were Miss Harvey what you choose to believe, which I deny in toto, you would have no grounds on which to claim a divorce, unless I treated you with personal cruelty, which I believe you cannot accuse me of doing."

"That cannot be the law," said Mrs. Herne, a sudden shiver, however, running through her frame.

"Is it not?" said her husband, complacently. "You are better informed, perhaps, on the law of husband and wife than I am."

CHAPTER XVII.

MRS. HERNE "UNDRESSES HER SOUL."

THE unpleasant excitement of Miss Harvey's visit occasioned Mrs. Herne an illness which proved very tedious. An attack of fever which confined her to bed for a week was the least part of it. Her recovery was very slow. The stimulants that would have really helped her to rally were hope and happiness, and those were precisely what she could not command. Her husband was not too kind. While her life

seemed in danger he appeared rather concerned, but when weeks passed and she was still unable for any exertion he grew impatient, and favoured her with very little of his company. Of her children she saw less than usual, being unwilling to enforce on them the quiet that was essential to herself. Hour after hour she spent lying on a sofa, in a darkened room, with no companion but her own thoughts. At such times the whole of her past life often rose in review before her, especially the years since her marriage. The record thus presented might fairly be called that of a blighted life.

Leonora was aware that in society she was sometimes spoken of as a fortunate woman who had made a "good" marriage when a penniless girl. But she herself knew how joyless was the existence passed with one whom she could neither love nor respect. Yet little as her husband contributed to her happiness she could not afford to slight him. She was in the position of a gambler who has staked his all on a single throw of the die. Most married women are in that position. If domestic life disappoints them, they have no compensation whatever. Leonora had sunk her all in the lottery of marriage, and drawn—a blank. Sometimes she told herself that things might have been worse. Her husband, so far as she knew, was not

vicious. Often his groundless jealousy had made her miserable, but he had never, until now, given cause for jealousy on her part. She had done her best, therefore, to cherish his affection, such as it was. She studied him in every respect. Every other claim she waived whenever he expressed the slightest desire for her company. To please him, she, season after season, went through a monotonous round of dressing and entertainments, which she had neither strength nor spirits to enjoy. For the same reason, she took pains to dress becomingly, and chose the colours that he admired. Connected with this subject, however, were some of her most unpleasant experiences. Mr. Herne, in addition to his other demerits, was a great screw. If his wife appeared less well-dressed on any occasion than he approved, and he was a very critical judge, he declared she was a dowdy and disgraced him, yet he invariably grumbled about paying her bills. More than once she had asked for an allowance for her private expenses, requesting him to fix the sum, and promising not to exceed it; but he refused. He liked the artificial superiority which the pecuniary dependence of a wife confers on a man, and was very jealous of any attempt to equalize the relations between a married pair. His sentiments were quite in accordance with those of certain noble

lords, who apprehended that if a wife had money at her own disposal she would expend it on a diamond necklace, or form a commercial partnership with "Cousin John."* The diamond necklace Mr. Herne would not have objected to so long as it was not to be paid for out of his pocket, but he was desperately jealous of imaginary Cousin Johns. But now all vexations of this nature appeared insignificant in the eyes of Mrs. Herne. A new misery had thrown its shadow across her path. Cæsar's wife must, of course, not be suspected, but Cæsar was clearly amusing himself. Her husband's relations with Rosaline Harvey afforded Leonora food for much and sorrowful speculation. He, indeed, had denied that there were any, beyond those of mere acquaintance, but Leonora did not accord implicit credence to the assertion. As regarded Miss Harvey's invitation, she never knew whether or not he accepted it. He did not dine at home on the evening of her dinner-party, but his wife deemed it best for her own peace of mind, if the words may be used in connection with the affair, not to investigate where he dined. She felt that her own illness had occurred at a very unfortunate juncture, for she dreaded the consequences of her husband finding

* See debate in the House of Lords on the second reading of the Married Women's Property Bill, June 21, 1870.

his home dull. Under these circumstances, few things could have pleased her more than to see that he began to take increased notice of the children, especially of the girl, who was between six and seven years of age, and very engaging. He took her to the Zoo, one day, and more than once into the park.

At last Mrs. Herne had so far recovered that she felt she would be the better for the fresh air, and she asked her husband to accompany her in a short drive. He muttered an indistinct excuse; he was busy, and sorry he could not go that day.

She gave a little sigh, for the weather was propitious, and she had been seven weeks confined to the house. She had not spirits to go alone, and as she lay on the sofa in her bedroom, with eyes rather wistfully directed towards the trees in the square, which were a mass of lilac and laburnum blossom, her maid entered saying—

"I have just been putting on Miss Alberta's best frock and hat, ma'am, to go out with her papa."

A pang shot through Mrs. Herne's heart, as she recalled her husband's excuse for declining her request for his company. But the next instant, she chid herself. She could not be jealous of her own little girl. So when Alberta came into her room, looking very pretty in her

nice frock and hat, and announced that she was going to drive with papa, Mrs. Herne kissed her; bade her be sure not to trouble papa, and tell her all about her drive when she came back.

And in spite of that passing sense of neglect, Leonora felt soothed and pleased, as she saw her husband and his little daughter go out together. She thought, "If he once really takes to the children, he will grow fond of home, and we may be a happy and united family after all."

It was close on his own dinner hour when Mr. Herne brought back the little girl, who ran up to her mother's room, eager to exhibit some very recherché French bonbons.

"Those are pretty," said Mrs. Herne, "almost too pretty to eat, are they not? Did papa give them to you?"

"No, the lady we went to see."

"What lady, dear."

"The lady who has such a pretty drawing-room."

As a good many of Mrs. Herne's acquaintances were fortunate possessors of pretty drawing-rooms, this description was not explicit.

"Do you not remember her name?"

"No," said Alberta, absorbed in the contemplation of her bonbons. She was summoned to

the nursery tea before any further particulars had been elicited.

The following morning, as the children were playing in their mother's room, Alberta took up one of her slippers.

"Mamma, why are not the heels of your shoes gilt, like the lady's papa took me to see yesterday?"

Then Leonora knew to whose house her child had been taken.

She lay very still and silent after making this discovery, but when her husband shortly after entered to pay her a short visit, she hastily dismissed the children.

He came up to the sofa, and stood beside it.

"How are you? You don't look so well as you did yesterday."

"I cannot be well, after what I have just heard," was the reply, gravely. "Henry, is it not enough that you go yourself to visit Miss Harvey but you must take that innocent child?"

This remark was the commencement of a bitter altercation—the most bitter that had ever taken place between them.

In the heat of recrimination, Leonora reproached him with having pleaded business as an excuse not to drive with her, when he merely

wanted to carry out this plan. To which accusation he retorted—

"You could drive without me, I suppose; you have a carriage at your command, which you never would have had but for me."

The ungenerous sarcasm cut her proud spirit to the quick. Leonora felt at that moment that she would rather earn her bread by the toil of her fingers than be indebted for luxuries to that man. He left the room, and she knew that she would not see him again for hours.

Her solitary morning dragged on, even more heavily than any she had spent during her illness. As she moved languidly, yet restlessly, about her spacious chamber, which was filled with all the appliances of luxury, she paused before a cheval glass, and surveyed her own appearance.

"All that he ever valued," she said bitterly, to herself, "were my looks, and now they are gone. I look old and haggard."

And she was not far wrong. Beauty, of a certain kind, she could never altogether lose; the symmetry of her features, her fine, dark eyes. But sorrow and disappointment had done the work of years. Her tall figure looked gaunt rather than graceful. There were hollows under the eyes, her cheek was thin and pallid. She turned away with the feeling that any wife

might have who knew that her beauty was all that ever held her husband's affection, and that that had vanished.

An indescribable feeling of desolation took possession of her. She felt a yearning for kindness and affection. Hitherto Leonora had observed a proud reticence with regard to her domestic trials. If any of her acquaintances surmised that Mrs. Herne was not happily married, it was from no word or hint dropped by herself. But to-day she felt a longing to open her heart to some female friend. She stood in need of both sympathy and counsel. But to whom could she turn? The jealousy of her husband extended even to female friendships: thus, while she had a large circle of acquaintances, there was not one lady with whom her intimacy was otherwise than the most superficial. She felt this morning, when she had just come out of her illness, that she stood isolated in the world, that no one cared for her except her young children, and they were in a fair way of being separated from her.

But there is one Friend, to whom the afflicted in all ages have turned, and whom women, it may be because often the objects of wrong and oppression, have been ever particularly prone to seek. To this Refuge Leonora was no stranger, and she sought it now.

As she opened her Bible a faded marker fell out. It was of perforated card, embroidered with blue silk, which time had changed to a faint gray. On one side was worked a spray of forget-me-nots; on the other the inscription, "M. R. to L. H."

It was a school-girl souvenir from her early friend, Mildred Randall, between whom and herself all intercourse had long ceased. Mrs. Herne knew that the neglect was on her side. Mildred had proposed to correspond, but Mr. Herne had expressed a wish to his bride that she should not indulge in the young-lady habit of letter-writing; and Leonora, who had been trained in the belief that obedience is part of a wife's duty, had yielded the point. She was aware at the time that her refusal must have appeared to Mildred very ungracious—the more, that her marriage raised her in the social scale. But what was that compared to the obligation of obeying even the caprice of a husband? So she had been taught to reason, or rather to stifle reason.

The sight of that faded book-marker gave a new direction to her thoughts. It recalled the days when she and Mildred exchanged unreserved confidences, and she felt a sudden desire to renew the old intimacy. She had heard incidentally that the Miss Randalls were no longer

in Shaddon, and that Mildred had taken the eccentric step, as it was described, of entering a house of business in London. By an effort of memory she recalled the name of the merchant in whose office Mildred was said to have found employment, and she sent for a directory and sought for Mr. Cook's address.

Leonora had now an object for her first drive. She did not again ask Mr. Herne to accompany her; she went alone, and desired her coachman to take her to Mr. Cook's office.

It was a great proof of the barrenness of this woman's life, that the prospect of resuming an old school-girl friendship, which had dropped seven years before, excited her so much. During the drive she amused herself picturing the meeting, and the little stimulus made her feel better than she had done since her illness.

In answer to her inquiry for Miss Randall, she was shown into a small apartment which was used as a waiting-room. It was an hour when every one in the office was steadily at work, and Mildred, on being summoned from her desk, expected a professional interview. She entered pen in hand, and with her most business-like face. No wonder that she did not, at the first glance, recognize in the gaunt woman, enveloped in a large Indian shawl, who advanced to meet

her, the long-lost-sight-of companion of her early girlhood.

"You do not remember me," said Mrs. Herne. "Leonora Hazlitt."

She bent forward to kiss her, but there was not the slightest responsive motion on the part of the other.

"Oh! yes, Mrs. Herne," said Mildred; "it was only just for a moment. I had so little expectation of seeing you."

To Mrs. Herne's sensitive ear the tone was abrupt, not to say indifferent. Her own voice trembled, as she said—

"It is very long since we have met, but I heard you were in London, and was anxious to find you out."

"And I am very glad to see you again," said Mildred, in a cordial, though offhand, tone. In truth, the visit took her by surprise. She could not forget that her early friend, on marrying to wealth and position, had declined to keep up any correspondence, and had never made the slightest attempt to renew the acquaintance. She therefore, not unnaturally, wondered what brought her now. Mrs. Herne, however, felt chilled and disappointed. She had sought a renewal of the acquaintance with the express intention of "undressing her soul," to borrow the ingenious phrase of a modern French writer, and now that

they had met she felt repelled rather than encouraged. The thought passed through her mind that she was doomed to be always disappointed. Her hopes of happiness from love and marriage had already been defeated, and now it seemed that her attempt to find solace in friendship was equally to be a failure.

A pause followed the first greetings, for Mrs. Herne was struggling with emotion, and Mildred who remained standing though her visitor was seated, was also silent. Leonora looked at her as she stood on the hearth, with her hands behind her back, and thought how much less the long interval of seven years had told on Mildred's appearance than on her own; she was larger and fuller than at seventeen, but otherwise was little changed. The rounded cheek had the same fresh tint, the dark eyes the same clear light. Even at that moment, true to her feminine instincts, Leonora also thought, "Why does she cut her hair in that way? It is a great mistake."

The silence was broken by Leonora.

"Mildred, do you remember how we used to walk in the orchard behind my mother's house, with our arms round each other's waist?"

"And how we used to talk about all sorts of things," answered Mildred, her face softening. "Well, there must have been much that was

foolish and unpractical in our conversation in those days. Expectations of happiness that could not be realized, 'vows too pure to be performed;' but there was nothing, as far as I recollect, that we have reason to blush for now."

"We were ignorant alike of the world's sin and of the world's misery," faltered Mrs. Herne; "we little thought that one of us was destined to have the hard battle in life that you, I suspect, have had, Mildred; the other to be driven by poverty——"

She was about to say "into a loveless marriage," but checked herself.

Mildred turned and looked at her earnestly.

"Poor Nora!" she said, "you do not look well."

The tears which Mrs. Herne had with difficulty restrained now overflowed.

"Bless you for calling me Nora!" said she; "I have not heard that name since I married—*he* never calls me so. Mildred," she proceeded impulsively, "I did not come to you to speak commonplaces. I am a miserable woman, and want help and sympathy."

The ice was now broken between them. Mildred no longer looked cold and hard, but, at that moment, a voice in the next room, that of Mr. Walsh, was heard to say—

"Where is Miss Randall?"

Mrs. Herne immediately rose.

"I must not detain you," said she, pressing her lips to Mildred's cheek, "but you must come and see me. Promise that you will."

"Yes, that will be better," said Mildred, "for my time, at present, is not my own."

She attended her visitor to the door, and saw the fine carriage and servants waiting there. There was a contrast in the outward circumstances of the two friends. The comparison, perhaps, struck Mrs. Herne, for, as her foot was on the step of the carriage, she turned her head to take another look at the office. With a deep sigh she sank back among the cushions. Her thought was this—

"That girl has to work hard, but how much happier she is than I am. Whatever she has is her own, earned by herself; she is not indebted for luxuries to a man whom she can neither love nor respect, and who makes her feel her dependance every hour."

CHAPTER XVIII.

MISS RANDALL IN TROUBLE.

MILDRED wished her visit to Mrs. Herne to be not too hurried; so, a few days after this call, she asked Mr. Cook to grant her a half-holiday

the following afternoon. The old gentleman answered promptly—

"Yes, Miss Randall. But you need not ask it as a favour; you have earned it. All work and no play has, we know, a bad effect. Let me see. You want a half-holiday on Wednesday. There is nothing particular to be done on that day; take a whole one."

In what good spirits Mildred went home that night! It is worth while to work hard to purchase such keen, fresh enjoyment of every unexpected snatch of leisure. How pleasant it was to wake in the morning, and know that she had the whole day before her to spend as she liked! She had no intention of going to Mrs. Herne's till after luncheon, so she had the forenoon to dispose of otherwise.

She had just settled herself, soon after breakfast, to write one or two letters (she was always in arrears with her private correspondence), when the door-bell rang. A child's voice asked if Miss Randall was at home, and the servant brought in a message that a young lady wished to see her.

"Show her in," said Mildred, and enter Alice.

Flushed and tired she looked, but self-possessed as usual.

"Oh, Alice, who would have thought of seeing

you? Have you brought me a message from your aunt?"

"No, I have something to say for myself. Miss Randall, you once offered to buy my pony for a sovereign; if you like I will sell him to you now."

Mildred laughed. "My dear child, surely you understood I was joking? What could I do with your pony?" But Alice's face was so earnest, and fell so portentously at this answer, that Mildred saw there was no sense of the jest in her mind; so, recovering her own gravity, she asked,

"What has made you change your mind about wishing to sell him?"

"The pig is dead," was the reply, impressively.

"Well," said Mildred, more in the dark than ever, "it is a good thing the pony is still alive. What has the pig to do with it?"

"Aunt Althea gave me food for the pig," explained Alice, "on condition that I was to repay her when I sold him; now, I shall never be able to repay her."

"In fact, you cannot meet your liabilities; that is what you mean to say, Alice?" said Mildred.

"I cannot meet my liabilities," repeated Alice, gravely.

"Well, really," said Mildred, "this is a bad

business. I don't know what to say. For me to buy your pony is out of the question. I should have no place to keep him but here or in my bedroom, and that might not quite answer. But I intended to give you a present on your birthday. If you like I will give you the money it would have cost."

"Oh, really—did you intend it?" said Alice, dubiously, her delicacy evidently a little wounded.

"Yes, really, I should probably have given you a book about birds and beasts, with a great many illustrations. If I give you ten shillings instead, I should think that will pay for the food the pig has eaten."

Alice expressed her gratitude by an impetuous embrace, and, in restored spirits, she was running to the door, when Mildred called her back.

"Stop a minute," said she, "how did you get here?"

"I came by myself," was the reply; "I had often seen Aunt Althea take railway tickets, so I knew what to do. I took a third class, because I had only ninepence. Then I asked my way here."

"Did Miss Warburton give you leave?" asked Mildred, in surprise.

Alice looked a little confused, then said, with a bravado laugh, "No. She would not have allowed me to come, so I did not ask her."

"And do you think you did right to come under these circumstances?" demanded Mildred. "It strikes me that you have done extremely wrong. Miss Warburton will be grieved to find that you are untrustworthy."

Alice's face changed.

"Now, you must wait here," continued Mildred, "until I finish this letter, then I will take you home. It is not right for a little girl to go about alone in London."

"But if you take me home, Aunt Althea will know where I have been," suggested Alice, "and I don't like her to be grieved."

Mildred had resumed her pen, for she was really busy, but she laid it down again, and did not grudge a few minutes, to help to clear up the ideas of this little maid.

"And what do you intend to say to her, Alice, if she asks where you have been this morning? Will you tell her an untruth, my child?"

Alice looked embarrassed, and stood silent some minutes, her pretty face working with thought. Then she said, "I must tell her the truth."

"Ah, you are right at last," said Mildred, "though you were so wrong before. Depend upon it, Alice, that instead of saving Miss Warburton pain by concealing a fault, it would give her infinitely more to discover that you are capable

of anything even approaching to dissimulation."

Mildred now looked at her watch, and found that she had plenty of time to take Alice home, and return before it was the hour to pay her visit. But her line of march was destined to be rather different from that which she laid out. There was to be no visit to Mrs. Herne that day.

It happened that Miss Warburton, having been busily occupied, had scarcely missed her truant charge. When Mildred and Alice made their appearance together, her salutation to the latter was very slight.

"Ah, I am glad to see you, Alice, I was beginning to wonder what had become of you. You must never stay away so long." She greeted Mildred, however, with an inquiring look, almost an air of embarrassment.

Alice, who was now as eager to confess her misdemeanour as she had at first been to conceal it, began to tell her story, but was interrupted.

"Tell me by-and-by, dear. I am not able to attend to you just now. Run upstairs, Alice, I want to speak to Miss Randall."

No sooner was she alone with Mildred than she said in a tone of kindness and feeling, "Well, Mildred, I am very sorry. Whatever the mistake is, it must be annoying to you in the meanwhile, and if I can be of any use—"

"What?" exclaimed Mildred, in astonishment, "to what can you allude?"

It was now Miss Warburton's turn to look surprised. She involuntarily laid her hand on a newspaper, but said, with hesitation. "Then I have made a stupid mistake. I really feared from the similarity of name that your sister, Miss Randall"—

"What of her?" exclaimed poor Mildred, "oh, tell me."

Miss Warburton was not a woman to keep any one in unnecessary suspense; she took up the paper, and pointed to a paragraph, headed, "Singular case before a country magistrate."

"Yesterday, at the Hopton police court, a lady-like woman of highly respectable appearance, who gave her name as Isabella Randall, was brought up before Mr. Wood, on a charge of aiding and abetting an attempt to defraud creditors, by passing off as her own, goods which had been distrained belonging to a person with whom she lodged. The case was adjourned. His Honour said that instances of fraud, perpetrated by well-dressed and respectable-looking females, who, from their appearance, might pass as ladies, have lately been on the increase, and he is inclined to make an example of the present case. Miss Randall, who seemed to feel her position acutely, was remanded until to-day."

"Poor Isabella," exclaimed Mildred, "she has got into some awful scrape."

"To tell you the truth," observed Miss Warburton, "I had no doubt that you had come to ask me to help you in some way. But the similarity of name may be a mere coincidence. Your sister would certainly have sent you a telegram."

"I am not sure," replied Mildred; "I know my sister pretty well, and I think it more than probable that she would so lose her head in any great emergency as not to think of the telegraph. She has been living at Hopton for the last three months, with people of whom she thought a great deal. What is to be done? I had better go there at once."

"As the case was remanded, you may be in time if there is a train to suit," observed Miss Warburton, taking up a Bradshaw. "Now, Mildred, if you would like me to go with you, just say so."

We must now turn to Miss Randall, whose history, since she left Shaddon, may be summed up very briefly.

Her experience of boarding-houses had not been satisfactory. At one, the company proved vulgar and disagreeable. At another, her hostess appeared to be actuated by a philosophical desire to discover on how little sustenance her lodgers

could exist. She had probably heard the story of the man who tried to train his horse to live on a straw a day, and wished to repeat the experiment on a human subject, though, unfortunately for the good of science, Miss Randall, at all events, left before the result was proved. At a third establishment, a system of pilfering was practised by the servants. In short, there was always something that made the abode disagreeable, and each drawback seemed at the time the most unbearable. Miss Randall's sisters were inclined to blame her as capricious and fanciful, but perhaps her only error was in not seeing that disagreeables of some kind were inseparable from the life she had chosen. At length, when contemplating another change, she lighted on an advertisement in the "Times," which induced her to open a correspondence with the advertiser.

"A lady and her husband," so the paragraph was worded, "without incumbrances, having a larger house than they require, desire to meet with one lady, single or a widow, of amiable disposition and pleasing manners, to whom they offer the comforts of a refined and domestic home. Terms on application."

"This is none of your boarding-houses," Miss Randall said, triumphantly, casting a contemptuous Parthian glance at the home she was

about to quit, "where you are mixed up with all sorts of people. There will be the privacy and comfort of a private family, with the society of one nice married couple, the gentleman and lady of the house."

The terms, as stated in answer to her application, were considerably more than the whole amount of her income, but on her candidly explaining her circumstances she promptly received another letter, consenting to receive her for the sum she could afford; stipulating only that the first half-year should be paid in advance. Mrs. Myrtle, such was the writer's name, remarking that she was pre-possessed in favour of Miss Randall, and was unwilling to forego the pleasure of having her as an inmate. Miss Randall felt flattered by the implied compliment, and the arrangement being speedily concluded, removed to her new home, which was on the outskirts of a country town, with the intention of finding everything couleur de rose.

Nor did the reality disappoint her. The small establishment was very quiet and orderly. Her bedroom was freshly and neatly furnished. The table was fairly good, and soon she felt more at home than she had done since she ceased to have a house of her own.

In the case of married couples it usually happens that one or other is the ruling power. In

the case of Mr. and Mrs. Myrtle it was the latter. She was a quiet, rather graceful little woman, whose dress, always plain and simple, hung limply but not unbecomingly about her slight figure. A thoroughly feminine woman in appearance, tone, and manner, yet one who had obviously more strength and character in her little finger than her big husband had in his whole being. He was, however, inoffensive. He eat the meals provided for him; read the newspapers, and kept a good deal out of the way.

Mrs. Myrtle was very kind to her lodger, and took pains to make her feel at home. She studied her comfort in little things in a way that was very pleasant to Miss Randall. If Isabella mentioned incidentally that she liked any particular dish, it was sure in a day or two to appear at table. On a cold day on retiring to her bedroom, she would have the pleasant surprise of finding a cheerful fire burning, which was more than she had bargained for.

"I do believe she really likes me," Miss Randall said, gratefully, "and I feel that we are fast becoming friends," and poor Isabella, who had not too many friends, felt she had made an acquisition.

When she had been about six weeks domesticated in the family, Mr. Myrtle left home rather suddenly, "To visit friends," his wife explained.

Isabella did not object to his absence. She considered that a house is all the pleasanter without the presence of a man, and she and Mrs. Myrtle went on most harmoniously together—quite like sisters. In the evening, after tea, they sat with their work and a book, alternately chatting and reading aloud to each other.

"And you cannot think how pleasant and sociable it is," Isabella wrote to her sisters, "I am so fortunate to have met with such a home, and such delightful people."

One day there were symptoms of some disturbance in the house. Nothing indeed very tangible, for Mrs. Myrtle, gliding about quiet and undemonstrative as usual, dropped neither word nor hint, yet Isabella felt, though it could be no concern of hers—that something was going on. In the course of the morning she was sitting at work in her own room, when Mrs. Myrtle entered carrying a small substantial-looking box, fastened with a padlock.

"Would it inconvenience you to allow this box to stand here for a few hours?" said she, "I am going to have some of the rooms cleaned, and it would be an accommodation."

Miss Randall of course assented.

"It will be less in your way if I put it in this cupboard. There," placing it beneath a trunk of Miss Randall's, that was concealed by some

cloaks, "I don't think that will inconvenience you."

She had been gone only a few minutes when a heavy step approached the door, a hand was laid on the lock, and Mrs. Myrtle's voice was heard to say, "I assure you that is our boarder's apartment. The things there are her property. You have nothing to do with them. Pray respect her privacy."

In spite of this remonstrance the door was unceremoniously opened, and a rough coarse man walked straight in, followed by Mrs. Myrtle. Miss Randall rose hastily.

"This is my room, sir; I think you must be making some mistake."

"Sorry to cause inconvenience, ma'am," was the reply, "but I am only acting on my warrant. As you probably are aware, there's an execution in the house."

Miss Randall almost screamed. The man looked round and began to take an inventory.

This recalled Miss Randall to the necessity of action. As he touched a trunk she flew towards her property, and laying her hand upon it, said, "This is mine. You have no right to meddle with it."

"Are these boxes and all they contain your exclusive property? Can you swear to this effect?"

"Yes," impetuously.

"This, and this, and this?" laying his hand on one box after another.

"Yes! yes! yes!"

"This?"

"Yes, no, yes," scarcely knowing what she was saying, or to which box he was alluding.

"Yes, no, yes," repeated the man, gruffly, "that won't do. This box is heavy. Seems to contain plate."

"Only the few forks and spoons belonging to our lodger," said Mrs. Myrtle, throwing an intelligent look towards Isabella. The signal was not lost on the police officer.

"Oh! there is an understanding between you two. Birds of a feather. You will have to appear before the magistrate, ma'am," to Isabella.

"A magistrate? me?" gasped Isabella.

"Yes, ma'am, if ladies choose to play such pranks as these, they must put up with the consequences. The cock bird has flown, but you and madam here will have to come along with me. Many a one I reckon have burnt their fingers through trusting you."

There was no help for it. Within ten minutes Miss Randall, hardly conscious whether she was treading this earth or not, found herself, together with Mrs. Myrtle, on the way to the Court House, escorted by a police officer.

Mrs. Myrtle, for her part, was wonderfully col-

lected, and as they walked side by side through the village, she remarked with philosophical coolness to her companion in misfortune—

"I knew it must come to this sooner or later, and I am only thankful that Mr. Myrtle got out of the way first, for I am comparatively safe. As a married woman I cannot be sued independently. This is not the first time we have been in such a scrape. Ah! Miss Randall, you little know what adventures we have had in our lives."

Miss Randall was unable even to upbraid her.

The magistrate's time was fully occupied, and the hearing of their case had to be adjourned.

Such a four-and-twenty hours as Miss Randall spent. She and Mrs. Myrtle were allowed to return home, but a constable remained in charge of the house.

Isabella relieved her feelings by writing an incoherent account of what was taking place to both her sisters, imploring them to come to her aid, though she had little hope, even while she wrote, of the letters reaching them in time. As Mildred rightly conjectured, the possibility of communicating by telegraph did not occur to her. She had never in her life had occasion to send a telegram, and would have scarcely known how to set about it.

While she was pouring out her soul upon

paper, Mrs. Myrtle, who honoured her with her company in her own room this last evening, was sufficiently composed to occupy herself as she sat by the fire, in crocheting some scarlet silk, among which her slender white fingers moved nimbly. Her face was thoughtful, though placid, until suddenly she dropped her work in her lap, and broke out into a very genuine little laugh. Miss Randall looked up reproachfully.

"What a farce it is," said Mrs. Myrtle; "dear Myrtle has not a will but mine! yet I am supposed to act under his coercion, and the best of the fun is that they *must* bring it in so. As the law stands they have no choice but to acquit me. You cannot think, Miss Randall, what a protection that law has been to us. I need not disguise from you, at least it is too late to do so, that—well, circumstances have obliged us to live a good deal by our wits. Whenever a storm seems brewing we take care that dear Myrtle gets safe out of the way, while I remain, and the storm passes scatheless over my head. By-and-by I rejoin him on the Continent or elsewhere, and find most likely that he has been quietly enjoying himself very much. As he knows I am in no real danger, he is able to be happy and comfortable. Once he spent some most pleasant weeks among the English lakes."

"I am sure," exclaimed Miss Randall, "if that is English law it is most preposterous, and ought to be altered without delay."

"There's not much danger of its being altered in our day," remarked Mrs. Myrtle, contentedly; "poor Myrtle and I will both, we may hope, be gone to a better world before any change is made. But I am forgetting that you must be hungry, Miss Randall. Now, I'll tell you what, we will make ourselves snug over a little supper this last night. There is not the slightest use in attempting to save my stores, for those wretches will seize everything, so I will bring up a bottle of really fine wine I was keeping in case of company. There is some meat in the larder, and you shall see what kind of plat I can make. I learnt a little cookery once in Paris."

In spite of Miss Randall's protest, Mrs. Myrtle went out of the room with her keys in her hand, and in a few minutes reappeared with a tray, on which were meat, wine, spices, &c., &c. She arranged the fire for her saucepans, and when Isabella came in from posting her letter, she found the table drawn close to the fire, and a most recherché little supper prepared, to which one of the two did ample justice.

The following morning Isabella was forced to appear again at the police court; the build-

ing was surrounded by a low and dirty rabble, and in the hall were a sprinkling of persons of a superior class, whose eyes Isabella shrank from meeting. She felt, to use her own expression, ready to sink into the earth.

The magistrate questioned her.

"What is your name?"

"Isabella Randall."

"Married or single?"

"Single," faltered Isabella.

"An unprotected female," said a voice in the crowd.

"How old are you?" asked the magistrate.

Now Isabella had a weakness for appearing young. This abrupt question was unexpected, and disconcerted her. She hesitated.

"Come, ma'am, speak out," said the magistrate, impatiently; "forty-five?"

"No," indignantly; "not nearly so much. I am sure I don't look——" The remainder of the sentence was lost in the burst of laughter elicited from the auditors, and a vulgar voice was heard to say—

"Get nearer, Jem, there is a party being examined as promises to be some fun."

The blood mounted to the roots of poor Miss Randall's hair. "Really this is too trying," she said, almost crying, "to be set up here as a mark for every one to look at."

"No great sight either," some one remarked, jocosely.

The crowd were called to order.

"Now, ma'am," said the magistrate, impressively, "attend to me, if you please. You stand here on a serious charge: on nothing less than a charge of conspiracy."

"Conspiracy!" almost shrieked Isabella; "do I look like a conspirator?"

Another roar of laughter, which made the call of "Order, there!" for some seconds ineffectual, but next moment the crowd at the lower end of the hall divided, and two ladies pressed forward. Miss Randall turned her head, and uttered a cry of joy as she recognized her sister.

The appearance as her vouchers of Mildred and Miss Warburton, the latter of whom had a public reputation, brought seasonable support to Miss Randall. A very few words on their part were sufficient to testify to her character and antecedents. Moreover, strengthened by her sister's presence, she was able to give her own evidence in a rather more collected manner, and in a very short time she was discharged.

No sooner had she made her escape than her overstrained nerves gave way, and it was not until Mildred had procured a glass of water in an adjoining room, and administered every con-

solation in her power, that she could control her inclination to hysterics.

When so far recovered as to be able to walk from the police court, a new view of her misfortune flashed upon her. Wringing her hands, she exclaimed piteously, "How am I to live for the next three months? I paid to those—those swindlers, half a year in advance, and it leaves me all but penniless!"

"You are coming home with me of course," said Mildred. "You must stay with me till your next money is due, at any rate."

"But I cannot consent to be a burden upon you; it would not be fair at all."

"What do you propose to do, then?" asked Mildred, quietly; "answer another advertisement?"

"Oh, my dear, don't speak of such a thing!" gasped Miss Randall; "I have had enough of advertisements."

"So I should suppose. Now, never mind what is passed, Isabella, it can't be helped. Let me introduce you to Miss Warburton."

Isabella had often felt annoyed at Mildred's intimacy with Miss Warburton, against whom, on account of her appearance on platforms, she had a strong prejudice. Under other circumstances she would have responded coldly to the introduction, but she now grasped Althea's hand

with the fervour of gratitude, saying, in a rather agitated voice—

"It was very kind of you to come here to help me; I can't thank you as I should like to do. I felt so confused that I contradicted myself, and hardly knew what I was saying. But you and Mildred had all your wits about you, and you have saved me from a most painful position."

Miss Warburton smiled. "Your sister and I cannot afford to lose our heads. We have work to do which requires us to have our wits ready for use."

"Ah, I know," said Miss Randall; "you lecture about woman's suffrage, and you have converted Mildred to your opinions. Well, I hope that in any time of difficulty I may always have to do with suffrage ladies."

Mildred clapped her hands joyously. "Well said, Isabella! I consider that the highest compliment that has ever been paid to us as a body."

CHAPTER XIX.

FRANK HOTHAM.

We anticipate this story being charged with the singular defect of having no hero, but we

have undertaken to write a biography, not a romance. Real life very rarely resembles an artistically-arranged tale in which one hero usually figures from first to last. Viewed objectively, life is composed of a series of episodes, the dramatis personæ, in many cases, do little more than cross the stage. At the time we have been describing there was no hero in the drama of Mildred's life; moreover, there was no masculine ideal that occupied a prominent place in her imagination. She had had her early dream of love, and it was, she believed, passed and done with. Now her thoughts were engrossed with other interests; her heart was divided between her profession, and—oh, practical ladies of the nineteenth century—politics. Of these things she thought when she woke in the morning; they absorbed her through the day, and she read the newspapers when she went home in the evening.

But the Ides of March were not yet passed.

One Saturday afternoon, when the office always closed earlier than on other days, a card was brought into her sitting-room, on which was the name "Mr. Francis Hotham." Mildred thought of the lawyer at Shaddon, and felt pleased that he had come to London and took the trouble to call on her. She advanced to welcome him with extended hand, but stopped

abruptly when, instead of a rather short elderly gentleman, she found herself face to face with a tall, dark, distinguished-looking man, whom for an instant she believed she had never seen before. The other said—

"Are we such strangers? Have you forgotten Frank Hotham?"

We do not say that Mildred's heart did not flutter, that the colour did not deepen on her cheek, as this man—who had been the object of a very real, if foolish, and romantic passion—so unexpectedly stood before her; yet in looking back upon this moment, she felt surprised that she had been so little stirred. Two years before she would have said that the day could never come when she could meet Frank Hotham so calmly as she met him now. They conversed as old friends. He told her that he had only a few weeks before landed from Australia, and intended to spend a year or eighteen months in England. He had asked about her in Shaddon, and had heard, with sorrow, of her own and her sisters' pecuniary losses.

"And so you really work in a merchant's office?" he said. "How noble of you to make such an effort. It is very hard on a woman to be forced to depend on her own exertions."

"It is hard, perhaps, as things are at present," answered Mildred, "for a woman has such

difficulty in finding remunerative employment."

"Men's part is to work," remarked Frank, "and women's——"

"To weep?" interrupted Mildred.

"I hope not; I was going to say, a woman's part is to enjoy the fruit of man's work."

Mildred did not thoroughly agree with this sentiment, but she let it pass.

Conversation proceeded with great flow, and without any appearance of embarrassment. They spoke of places and people whom they had known together; and he touched lightly, though with feeling, on more than one trifling circumstance in the days that were gone by.

Mildred was pleased and interested, yet her reflections as she looked at him were very matter-of-fact.

"How strange to think that for years I thought about this man perpetually, by day and by night almost. He is handsome—very handsome, certainly; gentlemanly and agreeable, but he is not the demi-god I used to imagine."

At first she was struck only with the change in his appearance, but by degrees she felt that he was not so much changed. Tones of his voice fell familiarly on her ear, and when at parting he retained her hand a moment, and looked straight and earnestly into her eyes, Mildred's

colour deepened, she felt that the past and the present were not quite so disunited as she had imagined.

After he was gone she sat for some time in a deep reverie. This visit brought her face to face with a vanished time, between which and the present a great gulf was fixed. She saw again the girl of sixteen who walked in the green lanes around a country village, dreaming about a future, how different from that which years had brought.

"Ah! me," she sighed; "how long ago that seems!" How she herself was changed. She was fast becoming a hard, sceptical woman of the world, nevertheless she found that day that there were things for which she still cared besides professional work and woman's suffrage. A shower of tears, soft as summer rain, followed Frank Hotham's visit.

She was roused from her reverie by a call from Miss Warburton, who came to tell her that she was arranging a public meeting, and to ask her to take part in it. This request effectually recalled Mildred to practical realities. She had never yet spoken in public, and she felt that to do so would be to take a great plunge; but Althea was bent on obtaining her acquiescence. She had been studying Mildred's capabilities, with the view of producing her as a lecturer,

and had come to the conclusion that she was peculiarly fitted for the rôle. Her opinions were all very clear and decided. She could speak from personal experience of the suffering the present state of the law and of society entails on women, and she habitually expressed herself well. Miss Warburton promised that she should have plenty of time to prepare her speech, and that she should not on this occasion be asked to do more than move or second a resolution. Mildred's objections did not proceed from any real reluctance; she allowed them to be overruled, and consented to her name being advertised in the list of speakers at the impending meeting.

In the course of the following week, Mildred, on returning home one evening from the office, found Frank Hotham's card, which he had left in her absence; and a few days afterwards she encountered him close to her lodging, where he had again been making an unsuccessful appeal.

"You have no time," said he, inquiringly, "to bestow on an old friend?"

"I have very little time," she answered, "to bestow on new acquaintances; but old friends are quite a different thing. I make time for them, though, really, I am very much occupied except on Sunday."

"Will you, then," said he, "take a walk with me on Sunday afternoon?"

Mildred hesitated half a moment, then said frankly, "I shall be very glad."

Between the making of this engagement and its fulfilment nearly a week intervened, and during this time Mildred thought more frequently about Mr. Francis Hotham than was consistent with her imagined perfect indifference. The fine spring weather had just set in, and on Sunday afternoon she assumed a pretty, becoming muslin dress, and a white bonnet with a few pink flowers. She saw that she looked well, and as she arranged her dress before the glass, she thought, "I look younger than I did at twenty." Of course she did. Moping and *mooning* destroy any one's looks. She felt glad to think that Frank would see her to more advantage than on the day he called when she had on the black jacket and skirt which she wore at the office.

But in the midst of these thoughts she suddenly checked herself. What was she doing dressing for him? Was it possible that feelings which she flattered herself were dead and buried, were regaining their ascendency? She felt angry, impatient, and almost wished that he had not come home at all. She had been going on very well, and now he had come in her way only to disturb the even current of her life. She sat down, and covered her face with her

hands, as she murmured impatiently, "I thought I had shaken all this off. Am I never to get the better of it? A loud double knock made her start, and the servant announced Mr. Hotham. His eye lingered on her figure.

"It is rather hard," he observed, with a smile, "that time should have gone on so fast with me, and stood still for you."

"Time has not moved on faster with you than with me," answered Mildred.

"Has it not! Look on that picture and on this. I have gray hairs."

"Have you?" said Mildred, laughing. "Keep your own secret, and no one will guess it."

He proposed that they should go to Kensington Gardens. When they had walked a few paces from the house, he observed, "We may compare our acquaintance in the past to a conversation that was broken off. It proceeded a certain length, then was interrupted. Is your memory sufficient to take it up where we left off?"

The necessity of crossing the street prevented Mildred replying, and his question was unanswered.

They went into Hyde Park, and from thence into Kensington Gardens. Their conversation was nothing to record, but it must have pleased themselves, for the time seemed to pass quickly. At last, finding a quiet shady seat, they sat

down, and an interval of silence followed. Frank sat looking thoughtfully before him; Mildred was feeling very happy. Suddenly he took out of his waistcoat-pocket a very small morocco case, and as he opened it, the sunlight flashed on a diamond of great brilliancy.

"Will this fit you?" said he; "I think it will. I carried away the size of your finger in my memory, and I brought the stones home on purpose to have them set for you."

Mildred coloured. "It is beautiful," she said; "but—this diamond must be very valuable—I could not accept such a costly gift."

"Mildred," said Frank, and he took hold of her hand, "let me put another ring on your finger, then you can have no scruple about wearing this above it."

Mildred made a slight effort to withdraw her hand. Her face was turned from him, but her cheek was dyed with crimson, deep as that of a damask rose.

When they resumed their walk the diamond ring had been accepted on the conditions Frank proposed.

As they neared home the conversation turned on Mildred's occupations. She mentioned that between the duties of the office (which she must now, of course, give up) and working at intervals for the woman's suffrage cause, she had a

great deal to do. The latter allusion Frank received with a mocking smile.

"Do you go in for woman's rights?"

"To be sure I do; the movement is very important. I hope you support it."

"I do not. I think the agitation all nonsense. What do women want with votes?"

"The same as men," said Mildred; "as a protection, for one thing."

"Nonsense," rejoined he, laughing; "what good would a vote do you, for example? Are not you my morning star? I shall care in future to make money, and to rise in the world, far more for your sake than for my own. What advantage would a vote be to you?"

These words, which said so much and implied even more, could not be displeasing to Mildred, but she shook her head, and answered, "Ah! you need to be converted; I won't undertake the task; I must introduce you to Miss Warburton."

"Thank you, I would rather not. I have heard of Miss Althea Warburton, and I am convinced she is an insufferable woman."

"Now, Frank," exclaimed Mildred, "not a word against Miss Warburton; she is my greatest friend."

"I am sorry for it," said he, growing suddenly grave. "A woman who can come before the

public in the way she does must have discarded all the attributes of her sex."

"I don't know what that means," said Mildred; "I don't believe you do yourself. You must have been studying the speech Mr. Herne made in Parliament about women. He talked about attributes. But I expect you to come to our public meeting and support me when I make my maiden speech."

Frank Hotham quite started.

"Your maiden speech! what do you mean? You surely have no thought of coming out in that line?"

"Why not?" said Mildred. "Many ladies speak, and I have consented to second a resolution which will be moved by Miss Warburton; and Lady ——— is to take the chair."

"And your sisters," said he; "surely Isabella and Georgina do not approve of this?"

"Why, no; I'm not sure that they do."

"And you act in defiance of their wishes?" he asked.

"Well, defiance is a strong term," said Mildred; "but when our opinions differ I must follow my own judgment. I cannot give up a course I feel right because Isabella and Georgina disapprove."

"They might be safer guides for you," said he, "than some whom you have chosen."

Mildred seemed inattentive to this last remark. She said thoughtfully, after a moment—

"Francis, I don't know that I ought to have softened away your expression of *defying* my sisters. They did disapprove very strongly of many things I have done, and I took my own course in defiance—I suppose that is the right word—of their wishes. I must not let you think me more amiable than I really am."

"Such as you really are I love you," said he, with a smile. "But about this meeting. It would go against my feelings more than I can express to see you address a mixed audience from a platform. I could not bear that you should be the object of impertinent criticism, or equally impertinent applause. Will you, dearest, grant my first request, and give up your intention?"

Mildred hesitated for a moment, but only for a moment. She said to herself that it could not make much difference whether she spoke or not. She might win him over to her views by degrees; but, in the meantime, it would be very ungracious to refuse his first request. She therefore gave the promise he required.

Then they changed the subject to one on which they had no difference of opinion, viz., their plans for the future.

"We will go out overland, of course," said

he; "you will prefer that, will you not, to the voyage round the Cape?"

"Yes, greatly," replied Mildred; "I shall enjoy the overland route immensely. I have had so little opportunity of seeing different places, and I long to see more of the world."

"I'll tell you what we can do if you like," said he. "We may spend the winter in Rome."

"Oh, charming!" she exclaimed, her eyes shining bright as stars.

As the meeting at which Mildred was to have spoken was being already organized, she thought it due to Miss Warburton to lose no time in informing her of the change in her intentions. Accordingly, the first thing she did, when alone in her lodgings, was to write on a post-card, as follows:—

"Please withdraw my name from the list of speakers at the W. S. Meeting. I shall not be able to take any part. Will call to explain as soon as possible.—Yours ever, M. R."

The rest of the evening she employed in writing to her sisters.

By return of post, almost quicker than could have been expected, she received answers from both Isabella and Georgina. The most gushing letters. Her sisters were unqualifiedly pleased with the news she had communicated, and wrote

in the overflowings of affection and happiness. Within a very few days she received letters also from various members of Frank Hotham's family, whom he had informed of his engagement. They all were gratified with his choice, and nothing could be more cordial than their welcome to Mildred. Mr. Hotham wrote—

"God bless you, lassie! I have known you from a child, and feel like a father towards you. You have had the ups and downs of life, but now I think you will have its smoothness. Frank is a fine fellow, and has loved you a long while. He will make you a good husband. Be a good wife to him, as I know you will."

It was now necessary that Mildred should resign her clerkship. On her way to the office she called on Miss Warburton, who, early though it was, was seated at her desk.

The friendship between these two ladies had grown very close and unreserved. Each took a warm interest in the success of the other. When Althea gave a lecture that proved a grand succès Mildred was delighted. When Mildred got a rise of salary Althea was as pleased as if the money had come into her own pocket. This morning, therefore, Mildred called to announce her engagement, in perfect reliance on her kindness and sympathy. But she was mistaken in

her reckoning. Miss Warburton, on this occasion, was neither kind nor sympathizing. The message on the post-card had puzzled her considerably, but she understood the reason of her colleague's defection the moment Mildred mentioned that she intended to commit matrimony. Accordingly, Miss Warburton received the announcement with marked coldness. She uttered no reproach, she said very little; but, just because she did say so little, Mildred felt hurt and disappointed. Her few words of congratulation sounded cold and conventional; and almost the only question she asked was—

"Mr. Hotham, I think you said, is not sound on the woman question?"

"Not at present," answered Mildred, who had said nothing about his opinions; "but I intend to convert him."

Miss Warburton's face assumed an unpleasantly sceptical expression.

The conversation had no flow; and, at the end of a quarter of an hour, Mildred rose, feeling that she had never had so little enjoyment in Althea's company.

She was unwilling to go without a few pleasanter words, and, after a cold good-bye had been exchanged, she still lingered, and asked—

"Have you nothing more to say?"

"What more can I say?" replied the other

dryly. "I have already said that I hope you may be very happy in the line you have chosen, and I sincerely hope you may."

"We have been such great friends," said Mildred wistfully.

"No doubt we have, and very pleasant it has been; but that is all at an end now, so there is no use talking about it."

"But what is at an end now?" asked Mildred; "I certainly shall not forget you. I will write from Australia every mail (if you care for my letters), and I hope that you, in turn, will keep me informed on the progress of the movement."

"Oh! you are very good," interrupted Miss Warburton, "but I have very little time for reading long letters, and still less for writing them."

"Don't suppose," continued Mildred, "that I intend to give up working for the cause. Who knows but I may be able to establish a branch of the association in Australia, and get up meetings—would not that be grand?"

"Do not flatter yourself," said Miss Warburton, shortly. "Mr. Hotham has begun already to require concessions from you, what will he do when he is your husband?"

"But I shall not give way to him. I yielded the point about addressing this meeting because it really was immaterial whether I spoke or not; but it is not to be a precedent."

Miss Warburton shook her head incredulously.

"But now," said Mildred, who felt greatly disconcerted by all this, "will you come to my marriage? Of course you will?"

"You will be married by the Church of England service, I suppose?"

This question was no doubt intended to be, and was certainly felt as, a very severe cut. Many a time had Mildred expressed her conscientious objections to the marriage service of the Church of England. Now, however, that it had come to the point, she felt the full difficulty of acting consistently. She looked rather like a brow-beaten child.

"Well, I don't know, I am sure. I am afraid if I object it will make a dreadful esclandre. My people are all so painfully orthodox. Of course I shall not promise to obey Frank, or, if I am forced to say 'I will,' it will be with mental reservation; I shall mean that I will obey him in the same way as I expect him to obey me—each, that is, to show the utmost consideration for the other—"

She stopped abruptly, for she saw that her plan of mental reservation found no favour with her auditor.

"To leave that an open question," she added hastily. "You must come to my marriage, Althea, and I want Alice to be my bridesmaid.

I shall ask only one other, Mr. Hotham's youngest sister."

"Thank you," was the reply, gravely, "but it would only unsettle Alice; she is very busy with her lessons just now. To tell the truth, I should not much care to let her witness the ceremony. She has been taught that each of us must be responsible for our own actions; and to see a woman swear obedience to a fellow-mortal, one, too, possibly—of course I don't say in your case—less pure, less high-minded than herself, would confuse my child's ideas of right and wrong; and to know that such vows were taken with a *mental reservation* would not mend the matter much."

CHAPTER XX.

FAST AND LOOSE.

It is due to Althea to say, that if she made herself, as most readers will probably pronounce, unwarrantably disagreeable during this interview, she had rarely felt so discomposed. She had expected great things from Mildred, and was vexed that the cause should lose her as an ally. She was disappointed in the *ideal* she had formed of her character. Above all, she was

annoyed to think of the remarks that would be made by both friends and enemies.

"What a handle for our opponents," she muttered bitterly. "The very thing that is so often prophesied of women. Let a lover come in the way and the principles all go to the winds!"

Altogether, Althea had seldom felt so ruffled, and she vented her feelings, after Mildred's departure, on the objects nearest at hand. Her pen was her first resource. She dashed off an article for a newspaper, in which she declared that the real obstacle in the way of women's emancipation is not the opposition of men, but the supineness of women themselves. She hurled bitter, stinging invectives against her own sex. Her pen was flying over the paper at lightning speed, when Alice came home from school. Not as usual dancing in, bright and joyous, but with slow step, sad and downcast. She had lost her place in one of her classes from not knowing her lesson perfectly. Miss Warburton's eyes flashed angrily upon her, and she reproved her with a severity that was more than commensurate with the offence.

Alice was not accustomed to be spoken to harshly. Miss Warburton had taught her to expect at her hands unvarying kindness, and above all, justice. She looked frightened, and began to cry.

But Althea was too wise and good a woman to be long under the dominion of temper. The sight of Alice's tears recalled her better self. "Am I to bully all the world because one friend has disappointed me? Wrong and absurd," was her brief judgment. So she called Alice to her, dried her tears, and promised to help her to master the difficult lesson. And, we may add, that the bitter article was revised, and its asperities considerably modified before it was sent to press.

Mildred, meanwhile, walked slowly and even sadly, towards Mr. Cook's office, to give in her resignation. She was too sincerely attached to Miss Warburton to be indifferent to her disapprobation, and the loss of her friendship would, she felt, leave her poorer, gain what she might of other things. But this was not all; Mildred felt lowered in her own opinion. She had a secret misgiving that she did lay herself open to the accusation of deserting her colours. Occupied by these feelings, she felt, for the time, almost oblivious of the bright future that was opening before her. It was not until she came in sight of Mr. Cook's office that her thoughts turned into a different channel.

She passed through the outer room, where the clerks were at work, and Mr. Walsh observed, pointing to the clock,

"Half an hour late, Miss Randall," adding, with a smile, "the first time you have ever been unpunctual."

Mildred offered a slight, though respectful apology, and asked if Mr. Cook was disengaged, as she wished to speak to him.

He was alone in his sanctum, and received Mildred's communication quite jocosely.

"Going to be married, eh? I have been expecting as much, I thought those black eyes of yours were capable of some mischief."

Mildred hastened to assure him, in the most demure manner, that he entirely misjudged her, she had had no intention whatever of marrying.

"No, no, of course not; we all know what such intentions are. They are quite unchangeable, until Mr. *Right* comes—and so, I am to lose my best clerk? and you expect me to say I am pleased, and to go out and buy you something pretty, a bracelet or a brooch, I suppose. But must I lose you? why not continue to occupy your stool here?"

"I am going to Australia," said Mildred, laughing.

"To Australia? I suppose, then, I must be content to lose you. Well," suddenly changing his bantering tone, "God bless you, my dear." And he shook Mildred's hand with paternal kindness.

The geniality of his manner struck her the more from its contrast with Miss Warburton's coldness; her voice was unsteady, and the black eyes were shining through something very like tears, as she said, "I have been very happy in this office, and I shall always be grateful to you, Mr. Cook; I could have wished nothing better than to have stayed on here."

"And I could have wished nothing better than to have kept you," answered he, "but you are, I hope, doing better for yourself."

From this day Mildred was involved in all the little bustle and preparation which seems inseparable from even the quietest marriage. Every day brought her letters of congratulation from early and distant friends, whom her engagement suddenly reminded of her existence. Wedding presents came in, and had to be acknowledged, and she began to order her outfit for Australia. Mildred objected to the word *trousseau;* she was not going, she said, to buy a quantity of clothes, more than she had any use for, still, she of course required some new things. Every afternoon, Frank called for her to walk or drive, or frequently to take a ride, for he told her that ladies ride a great deal in Australia, and he wanted her to be a good horsewoman. Mildred had never had opportunity of acquiring this accomplishment, but she took to it very kindly,

and looked, moreover, very handsome in her well-made habit. But in the midst of all this pleasant pre-occupation, she had one sore spot in her heart; owing to the manner of her parting with Althea. She could not let that formal adieu be the last, and one afternoon, in the course of a walk, she persuaded Frank to accompany her to call upon her ci-devant friend.

Though Frank and Miss Warburton had never before met, they had a strong mutual antipathy. Both, however, had too much ease of manner to exhibit the slightest embarrassment, nor had they any difficulty in finding commonplace nothings to speak about. Conversation was chiefly in their hands, for Mildred sat very silent. She listened to the discussion on the comparative merits of the different routes to Australia, on the likelihood of war in Europe, and she felt in her heart how entirely they were talking for the sake of talking. She looked round the room, where she was treated, and was feeling as a stranger, and could hardly believe that many a day she had spent hours there, helping Althea with her work, and talking unrestrainedly on every imaginable subject. But Miss Warburton gave no opening for anything different, and when her visitors rose to go, she took leave of Mildred with a shake of the hand as slight and cold as that she bestowed on the acquaintance of an hour.

Mildred's response was equally frigid, but by a sudden impulse she turned back from the door to kiss Althea. It was the last tribute to a past friendship, then she hastily rejoined Frank, who was waiting for her at the bottom of the stairs.

"Well, how do you like her?" she asked, as he made no remark on the call.

"I am rather pleasantly disappointed," he replied, using the curiously incorrect phrase which some people affect. "She is not so disagreeable as I expected."

Mildred only smiled faintly, she was not in spirits to scold him, as she might have done at another time.

They walked some way in silence. Suddenly he said—

"Mildred, I am going to ask a favour, and I think my darling will not refuse. I want you to promise that you will have nothing more to do with this women's rights movement."

"I have already agreed," replied Mildred, "not to speak at the meeting, and I will even promise, if you wish it very much, never to lecture or speak in public, unless you change your opinions, and consent cordially."

"But I want more than that," said he, "I wish you could give up caring about the subject. As long as you feel that you are making a sacri-

fice to oblige me, it will be unpleasant for us both. It would be much better to view the thing differently."

"That is not in my own power," answered Mildred. "I may say black is white to please you, but I cannot engage to think it."

"A great deal is in your own power," he observed. "If you seek your friends elsewhere than among the supporters of this movement; if you cease to stimulate your feelings by reading all the books and papers which these strong-minded ladies put in your way, your interest in the subject will gradually die out."

"Well, I call that most unreasonable, Frank, for in my heart I do approve of the agitation. I know it is called for, and I admire and reverence many of the people who conduct it. I may abstain from taking a prominent part personally, but I must always feel an interest in what is being done, and I should like from time to time to send a subscription (anonymously if you please) in aid of the funds."

"But that is the very thing I want you not to do," said Frank, whose tone was getting excited; "can you not be satisfied to fulfil the duties of your own sphere, and let politics alone?"

Frank had no idea how much he was asking of Mildred. He could not believe that she

really cared very deeply for the question at issue; in fact, he made the request much as he might ask some very trifling favour. Mildred quickly undeceived him in this respect, but he did not the less urge the point, the more perhaps from seeing how much importance she attached to it.

Frank was like the majority of men, who are too ready to believe that the ladies of their acquaintance who advocate women's rights do so merely for want of other occupation. It might assist them to form a juster conclusion if, instead of theorizing about women according to some fanciful standard of their own, they would simply believe that they are actuated by much the same motives as influence men. When any set of men are awakened to the consciousness that legislation, which nearly affects themselves, is pernicious and unjust, are they not—if they are worth anything—very much in earnest in seeking a remedy? Why should they imagine women are so different?

"Well, Frank, I must think this over," said Mildred; "I could not give such a promise offhand."

They had reached the door of her lodging, and they parted with, perhaps, a shade of coldness on both sides.

His last words were—

"Do not keep me in suspense longer than you can help."

"No, I will not. I will write to you to-night or to-morrow."

Mildred thought the question out that evening. Some of us, perhaps, can realize the struggle there was in her mind. It was a cruel test to which her principles were brought, for she saw clearly that the time had come when she must choose between her convictions and her lover. She tried to look at the question in every light. On the one side, tempting her to yield, were all her personal interests—love, ease, wealth—but then the thought arose, "Is my future life to be an acted lie? Am I to pretend that I disapprove of persons and opinions which in reality have my earnest approbation, or shall I endeavour really to eradicate my present convictions—labour honestly, as Frank wishes me to do, to stifle and repress them? But what is it that I am to repress and eradicate? Not my faults, my weaknesses, but instincts which I know to be the noblest I possess; which have been in my heart more or less from my very childhood; which have grown with my growth, and strengthened as my reason developed. When I was poor and struggling myself this movement, which has for its object to assist the helpless, to protect the oppressed, to raise all

womanhood, commanded my warmest sympathy. Are its objects less noble now than they were then? Shall I desert a great cause for the sake of my own happiness?"

As these thoughts came into Mildred's mind she felt herself nerved for any effort. She sat down and wrote to Frank. She told him that she could not give the promise he required. She stated, without reserve, her views and convictions, and that her object must ever be to aid the movement by every means in her power. Moreover, she said that in thinking the subject over she felt she had already compromised her principles by binding herself as much as she had done, for she now found that she could not marry except on the understanding that she was to continue an entirely free agent. She had no intention, she added, of neglecting domestic claims and duties, nor did she believe that she would the less well fulfil the latter because she had aims beyond her home circle; but as he probably imagined the two were incompatible she gave him back his pledge.

This letter gone, Mildred felt that she had come off victorious in a great temptation. At the same time it cannot be denied that she had an indescribable sickness of heart. Her suspense, until she knew what was to be the end, was almost more than she could bear. The follow-

ing morning she happened to be standing at the window when she saw him approaching the house. Her heart beat fast. He ascended the steps—but he merely gave in a letter, and turned away.

It was as follows :—

"I shall not trust myself to see you again, you have destroyed our mutual happiness. I cannot but take back the pledge you return, for the views you profess are quite incompatible with my ideas of domestic happiness. I am sure that man must have a miserable home whose wife spends half her time lecturing in public. You therefore judge wisely for us both —better break off now, however great the pain, than repent when too late. I shall return to Australia by the first vessel.—F. H."

CHAPTER XXI.

Il est un âge dans la vie
Où chaque rêve doit finir.

THESE lines of a pretty little French song which Mildred had lately heard sung, and which had taken her fancy, came into her mind as she turned her thoughts from the past to the future. She repeated them softly to herself, then mur-

mured, "It is well. Henceforth I shall devote myself without distraction to the objects I elect to live and labour for. Love and sentiment are a mistake. They bring only vexation. I'll have no more of them. A life of practical usefulness is the only one that can present solid satisfaction. My business and politics shall divide my attention."

The first thing to be done was to try and regain her situation in Mr. Cook's office, and, in the fear that her place might be filled up, she lost no time in applying.

In the outer room, occupied by the clerks, there was an air of idleness and relaxation, due to the fact of Mr. Walsh being absent from his desk, and one young gentleman pointed with his pen to the door of Mr. Cook's sanctum, intimating that the two great men were closeted together. When such was the case, it was the practice of the juniors to indulge in a great deal of whispering and chaffing, which accordingly was going on when Mildred entered. It subsided on her appearance, and pens were once more in requisition.

In a few minutes Mr. Walsh returned, and Mildred was told, in answer to her inquiry, that Mr. Cook was disengaged.

She found the old gentlemen with an immense ledger before him, and it struck her that he

looked worried and pre-occupied. He received her very kindly, and expressed surprise, though in a rather absent tone, on hearing that her engagement was broken off.

"As for taking you back," he said, "I shall be only too glad; it will save making too many changes in the office at once."

Mildred did not comprehend this allusion, but before she asked any question, he observed as he leaned back in his chair, and pushed his spectacles off his nose on to his forehead—

"I am very much annoyed and put about. I don't know whether you are aware that we are to lose Mr. Walsh?"

"No," said Mildred, "I had not heard that."

"He gave me notice some time ago, that he wished to set up for himself, and it is quite right, he has a very good opening. He did not intend to leave for six months, which would have enabled us to put everything in train, but a circumstance has occurred which unfortunately obliges him to leave within a few weeks, and I am at a loss what to do to fill his place. Not one of those boys in there," pointing over his shoulder towards the door, "is fit to be promoted to a post of responsibility, yet to bring in a stranger, who knows nothing of the details of the business, would be a bad look-out."

Mildred offered no remark.

"The fact is," continued Mr. Cook, "that Walsh knows, practically, more about the business than I do myself. I cannot be every day here, looking to everything as he does; my age and infirmities make it impossible. When one comes to be on the wrong side of sixty, Miss Randall, one is not quite what one was."

The old gentleman spoke thus of his difficulties to Mildred, simply because his mind was full of the subject. She said diffidently—

"I have given great attention to the details of the business, Mr. Cook, and until you have time to find a better substitute for Mr. Walsh, I think, if you like to trust me, that I could do his duty."

Mr. Cook looked up hastily. "I dare say you could. Walsh has said for some time that you were fit to conduct the business yourself."

Mildred's face flushed with honest pride. "I have owed a great deal to Mr. Walsh," she said, "but I had no idea he spoke of me so kindly."

"It would save a great deal of trouble if such an arrangement were practicable," resumed Mr. Cook; "still, I would not like to act hastily. We are about to take a very important step. I think we will have a few words with Walsh. Just ask him to step here, will you?"

A second time in her life Mildred's destiny depended on the fiat of Mr. Walsh. On the

present occasion, being referred to by his principal, he answered at once.

"I consider Miss Randall perfectly competent to take my place. Perhaps, as she is present," glancing towards her with a suppressed smile, "I ought not to say how highly I think of her ability and judgment."

Mr. Cook turned again to Mildred. "Then," said he, deliberately, "if you undertake the head clerk's work, you must have the head clerk's salary."

So Mildred was promoted to be chief of her department, with a salary of seven hundred a year.

CHAPTER XXII.

FORWARD.

It was fortunate for Mildred that this new phase of her life opened at the very time when her thoughts needed distraction. In truth, there was no danger of life standing still with her. Forward was the motto written in her path; her only difficulty was in finding time for half she wished to accomplish.

The women's suffrage meeting took place, and Mildred made her first speech in public. As is often the case, she found that the effort

required was not nearly so formidable in reality as in prospect. The hall was crowded, but she thought, not about the audience, and whether they were criticizing her, but of what she had to say. Her address, which was short and pointed, was so well received, and the following day in several of the Liberal papers so favourably commented upon, that Miss Warburton expressed regret that she could not make public speaking her speciality. This of course was impossible, yet by arrangement and method she was able to get through a great deal. Often after working in the office all day, she attended an evening meeting, and occasionally she produced a short article for a newspaper or review.

It was the easier for Mildred to undertake a certain share of public speaking, since she found, after a little practice, that she did not require elaborate preparation. She usually thought over the substance of what she wished to say, and when the time came was able to express herself, without hesitation, clearly and to the point. Sometimes she was called upon to move or second a resolution impromptu, and she succeeded equally well. Her elocution, also, was admired. In a word, she proved to have a gift for public speaking. But while her success gave so much satisfaction to one party, her sisters were annoyed by her appearance on plat-

forms, and she had a good deal to bear from the opposition of Isabella and Georgina. But Mildred reasoned thus. Nature creates no faculty but what is intended to be used. A woman, no less than a man, is not only justified, but called upon to develop every power with which her Creator has endowed her, to hide no talent under a bushel.

To return, however, to Mr. Cook's counting-house. Mr. Walsh remained in office about six weeks longer, and during that interval he took great pains to prepare his successor for her new duties. He gave her the benefit of his experience on many points, and neglected no detail that could be of use to her. In the course of one of their conversations, he observed thoughtfully, "I think this arrangement will work well. The only point on which I ever feel distrustful is, not of your capability, but of whether the others may be satisfied to work under you. It is not unlikely that there may be a good deal of feeling and jealousy on their part, and if so, they may make things, to say the least, very disagreeable. If you find any difficulty, I advise you to appeal at once to Mr. Cook. He will support your authority."

Mildred reflected for a moment, then said, "I don't think I can take your advice in that respect. I must be sufficient in myself for the

post, or give it up. The influence that has to be propped up by another is very superficial."

"I believe you are quite right," said he.

When the day came for Mildred to enter on her new responsibilities, Mr. Cook himself presented her to the clerks as their chef, on which occasion he made them a little address.

"Now, young gentlemen, Miss Randall is my representative, as Mr. Walsh has hitherto been, and her directions are to be obeyed just as his have been. Now mark this," and he held up his plump fore-finger impressively, and emphasized his words. "This young lady is put over the heads of you all, because she is the fittest for the post. I never had a clerk in the office who gave his heart to the work in the way she does, and I tell you plainly that I would rather lose every one of you than Miss Randall."

There were some sullen looks, but Mr. Cook took no notice of them, and by a sudden inspiration, went on. "I know there are persons who are not ashamed to offer a woman less remuneration than a man would require for doing the same work. I desire once for all to enter my protest against such unjust and ungenerous usage. I could not feel myself an honest man were I to avail myself of Miss Randall's work and offer her inferior pay because she is a woman. Talk of its being a principle of political economy

that women are to receive less than men! I know," raising his voice, "what the principles of justice and fair dealing are, and if I am a bad political economist, why—I would rather be the one than the other." (An ungrammatical sentence, Mr. Cook, but one is liable to slips in extempore speaking.) "But I don't believe that I am. The truest economy in the long run is to pay a fair price for a good article, and by depreciating the market value of women's talents, we are put off with much slovenly work on the part of men. Look at the lads who draw salaries in the Government offices! Many of them can't spell. Would not they be put on their mettle if they knew that clever women were eligible to compete for the post? Depend upon it the work of the country would be better done were all departments of the civil service thrown freely open to the competition of both sexes." He stopped abruptly, and turned round with a rather red face. "There, I have made a speech, Walsh."

"And a very good speech too, Mr. Cook."

This little address was no doubt well timed, since it showed the young men that if they chose to make any difficulty about working under Miss Randall, it would be they, not she, who would go to the wall.

As Mr. Walsh had foreseen, they did dislike

a woman being invested with the supreme authority; but they had to swallow the bitter pill. Moreover, the youths in Mr. Cook's office were gentlemen, and as such they were of course incapable of any vulgar and unmanly attempts—such as recently disgraced a certain institution in the north—to render the position of a lady uncomfortable among them. The feeling of jealousy, at first concealed, soon died out.

Not only did the arrangement work smoothly, but as weeks passed on Mildred was able to establish a very good tone in the office, and she found, to her unspeakable comfort, that she was competent to discharge her duties, both to Mr. Cook's and to her own satisfaction.

CHAPTER XXIII.

DID THEY DO RIGHT?—THE READER'S OPINION RESPECTFULLY ASKED.

A REMARKABLE change had been gradually taking place in the Miss Randalls' view of their sister's eccentricity. They watched her progress step by step as she rose in her profession, from the day she entered Mr. Cook's office on a salary of thirty shillings a week, till she became head of the department with an income of seven hundred a year.

During the time that Miss Randall stayed with Mildred, when she saw her nice home, consisting of a handsome set of apartments, her perfect independence, her generally flourishing condition, she said little, but she thought a good deal, and she imparted her impressions to Georgina in the long letters which it was the chief business of these two ladies to exchange.

When at parting (for Miss Randall, resolute not to encroach on her sister's hospitality, returned at length to a boarding-house), Mildred begged her acceptance of a cheque, and requested her to enclose one for the same amount to Georgina, Isabella received the gift reluctantly, with tears in her eyes; she felt it painful and humiliating to accept money from her younger sister, the fruit of that sister's own exertions.

One day Mildred received a letter from Georgina, which ran thus—

"Well, my dear Mildred! I have a communication to make on behalf of Isabella and myself, which, I think, will rather astonish you, though we have little doubt of its meeting with your approbation. We have resolved to throw pride to the winds, and turn our *one talent* to account —our taste in millinery. The wish to do so has been smouldering in my mind ever since you were here, in consequence of a conversation which you may remember while I was making

a bonnet. Your words produced a deep impression on my mind, and at last I opened the matter to Isabella, cautiously, for I did not know how she might receive it. But the same idea had been in her mind, and we have now quite resolved to embark in the undertaking. Talk of losing position! After all, what is the position that very poor ladies have to forfeit? We propose to open a small show-room—as good a one as we can achieve. Of course our little capital will all be risked, but to use one of your favourite mottoes, 'Nothing venture, nothing have.' And I do not think we shall fail. You tell me that I have taste and cleverness in millinery, and Isabella has far more than I. We feel quite sanguine and inspirited with the prospect. Every day I have experience of my own deficiencies as a governess, and Isabella, ever since that affair of her being brought into court, has been disgusted with boarding-houses. Besides, why should women be contented to live on a wretched pittance when they might try, at all events, to increase it? As you said to me, one can but use the talents one has, and if our talent happens to be for nothing higher than making pretty bonnets and caps, that is not our fault; it is best to use it such as it is. We shall be so anxious till we hear from you."

Mildred read this letter with true sisterly

interest. She saw at once that here was the assertion of a great principle—the right of a woman, born as a lady, to earn money and choose her own career. Millinery, inasmuch as it is a trade and not a profession, was not an occupation which as a rule she desired to see ladies adopt; far rather would she urge them to endeavour to break down the barriers which exclude them from liberal callings, such as do not necessarily involve descent in the social scale. She was, indeed, very jealous for her sex on this point, and rather deprecated the advice offered occasionally through the press that women should take to being national school-mistresses, &c. Such suggestions, it always struck her, smack of the spirit of trade unions. The cry at the present day of women for remunerative employment, demands an answer, and men offer them inferior occupations, in the hope of retaining the monopoly of others. In the case of the Miss Randalls, however, want of thorough education, and perhaps of natural ability, prevented them attempting to overcome obstacles; it was a question with them of using their one talent, or of leaving it buried in a napkin, and Mildred rejoiced that they were determined on the former course.

She was just starting for the office when the letter arrived, yet she could not resist assuring

them of her approbation at once; so she dashed off on a post-card, which was all she had time for, "I congratulate you most heartily on your resolution; it is the wisest you could have taken. Will write more fully this evening."

She turned the question over in her mind at intervals during the day, and when in the evening she fulfilled her promise, she suggested that instead of investing their little capital at once, it would be more prudent to join, for a time, some person already established, to learn how to conduct business. "There are technical details of which you are necessarily ignorant, and if you set up without experience, you will probably lose your money. I began at the lowest rung of the ladder, and I have reason every day to be thankful that I did so."

She very cordially tendered her services in any shape in which they could be of use, and concluded with a liberal offer of pecuniary support.

The above advice caused a little feeling of disappointment to the Miss Randalls. It seemed to them a greater sacrifice of pride to enter into commercial relations with other members of the trade, than to open an establishment on their own account; and at Miss Randall's age it was hard to take up the position of a learner. But their sister had given too good evidence of judg-

ment and capacity for business for them to think even of slighting her opinion, and they wisely decided to profit by her suggestion.

Inquiries in various quarters were accordingly instituted, and finally a negotiation was concluded with the Misses Lébee, London milliners, in a good way of business, the terms being that the Miss Randalls were to give their services for a certain number of hours every day, in return for being initiated into the mysteries of the profession.

Being then fairly set afloat, having pushed off in their little bark on the sea of enterprise, it was wonderful what a new spirit seemed to animate the two sisters; their eyes positively grew brighter, their countenances more expressive; they had an aim and object in life. As they now lived in London they were able often to visit Mildred in an evening, when they would speak over their prospects with most unwonted energy, and they laughed approvingly when she assured them that it was evident they had taken a new lease of life.

One evening Miss Randall called, in a state of great excitement. "Who do you think has turned up again?" she exclaimed, as she entered the cosy drawing-room, where Mildred, book in hand, sat enjoying her evening leisure in an easy-chair by a ruddy fire. "Mrs. Myrtle."

"You don't say so!" said Mildred. "I hope she has not taken you in again?"

"I wish I could say as much, though, happily, this time, only to the extent of five shillings and a luncheon."

Mildred made an impatient gesture.

"The resources of that woman are without end," pursued Isabella; "however, she is come down in the world. She called at our establishment, and asked to see one of the Miss Lébees, whose name you know is on a brass plate on the door; but they were out, and she was shown into a room where Georgina happened to be alone working at a trimming, and she told such a plausible story that poor Georgina, who had no suspicion who she was, actually gave her five shillings out of her own pocket, with an apology for offering so small a sum."

"Really," exclaimed Mildred, quite angrily, "that was too bad. You and Georgina deserve to lose your money for being so soft. The idea of being taken in by a plausible story from a person of whom she knew nothing; in London too!"

"I know it is very stupid to be taken in by impostors," assented Miss Randall, meekly, "and I felt half reluctant to tell you the story, for I knew you would blame Georgina. We have not the penetration and quickness that you possess,

Mildred. You will never be the dupe of any Mrs. Myrtle."

Mildred's tone as she admitted the improbability of such a contingency, was sufficiently self-complacent to be, perhaps, a little aggravating to her sister. But none of us are quite perfect; and if Mildred, acute and far-seeing as she had proved, did pique herself on the possession of those qualities, and occasionally betrayed that she held cheap those who possessed them not, it was no great wonder.

"Go on," she said, with a slight accent of irritation.

"Mrs. Myrtle," resumed Isabella, "came ostensibly to offer some embroidery for sale—Algerian work, she called it."

"What," interrupted Mildred, half rising from her seat, "Algerian did you say?"

"Yes; how she may have come by it is a different question. She wanted the Miss Lébees to dispose of it among their customers. Georgina told her she might call again, and as she spoke of her pressing necessities, gave her five shillings. In the midst of their conversation Mrs. Myrtle suddenly put her hand to her side, and said she felt so faint, might she ask for a glass of water."

"A glass of water!" ejaculated Mildred.

"Yes, all affectation and humbug," returned

Isabella, too engrossed with her own story to notice the peculiar effect it produced on Mildred. "Georgina happened to have a bottle of wine in the cupboard—we are obliged to have a little store, you know, as we often don't get home till late—so she produced it, and a plate of biscuits. Mrs. Myrtle refreshed herself with a couple of glasses of sherry and a good many biscuits, and was munching away very comfortably, when I happened to open the door to ask if the trimming was ready. The instant I saw her I stood still, and exclaimed, 'Mrs. Myrtle!' She looked me calmly in the face, and with a self-possession that was almost sublime, said, 'You mistake me, ma'am, for some other person. My name is White—Miss White.'

"However, she could not impose on me, I am too familiar with every line of her face. I said, 'You need not try to deceive me, *I know* you are Mrs. Myrtle.' Thereupon she got very red, and, without attempting any defence, hastily decamped. We were so taken by surprise that we had not presence of mind to stop her, or I believe we might have had her taken into custody; but she got away with poor Georgina's five shillings, after luncheoning at our expense."

During this narrative, Mildred more than once opened her mouth to speak, while her face grew more and more disturbed. She restrained

herself, however, until it was ended, then exclaimed—

"Oh! Isabella, she did the same to me!"

"But you did not give her anything, of course," said Isabella.

Mildred's colour mounted to her temples.

"Don't ask me," said she; "I cannot bear to think of it."

"Nay, tell me, dear; what did you give her?"

"I am ashamed to confess how much she got out of me. I gave her three pounds."

It was now Isabella's turn to look incredulous.

"Three pounds!" she repeated. "Oh! Mildred, you are joking."

"No joke to me, I assure you. She walked into the office about three days ago, when Mr. Cook was absent from illness, and I was writing in the private room. I remember now that, on seeing me, she stood still at the door for a moment, and looked undecided. I thought I had seen her face before, but could not recall where. She offered some embroidery, which she called Algerian. I told her that such finery was out of my line, but she said she was in the greatest distress, and I gave her the money. Then she went through the whole of the farce you describe; grew faint, put her hand to her

side, and asked for a glass of water. What could I do less than produce wine and biscuits?"

Isabella laughed.

"A most enterprising woman! I have no doubt she gets a luncheon at some victim's expense every day."

"Had she been a man," Mildred owned candidly, "I would not have given her anything, nor listened to her story for a moment; but I thought if women will not help women——"

"Yes, yes, we know your theory. Women are the angels who are to regenerate society," said Miss Randall, significantly. "Well, Mildred, I cannot help feeling amused at your being taken in."

"At least," said Mildred, "I shall never again be severe on the mistakes of others."

And she never was so. Mildred was one of those people who can improve and discipline themselves, and so grow wiser and better from every occurrence in life. The Mrs. Myrtle affair was for long a very sore subject, but it did her good. It cured her of one of her few faults.

CHAPTER XXIV.

"WITH WHOM DOES TIME GALLOP WITHAL?"

WITH the happy and the occupied. Of this number were both Miss Warburton and Mildred. The former was happy in seeing the cause, with which her name was identified, making gradual though sure progress, while she was daily living down the prejudice with which many persons had originally regarded her, as foremost in the van of strong-minded women. So long as she was personally known to few, it was easy to misrepresent her, and to raise a laugh at her expense; but now she was so generally known, her talents, her character, her principles, that ridicule and abuse alike fell harmless. Caricatures depicting her as ungraceful and badly dressed—half man, half woman—would have had no point. She was taking very high ground in public esteem. Her lectures were always largely attended, and were listened to with a respectful interest, due not only to the subject, but to the speaker. Articles from her pen found ready acceptance with editors of first-class magazines. Had she chosen to devote herself to literature, and to court popularity a little, she might have made a good income.

She was not without temptation. Having gathered laurels at a meeting of the British Association, at which she read a paper with great éclat, she received, a few days subsequently, a letter from the editor of a certain journal, offering her permanent employment and high pay, if she would consent to modify the expression of her views. Her opinions were rather too advanced, it was stated, to be generally acceptable; and though she might advocate woman's cause in a degree—indeed it had now become fashionable to do so—it must not be in the unqualified manner that was her wont.

Miss Warburton was far from a rich woman. Her means were, in fact, what she occasionally felt to be uncomfortably limited, and a permanent engagement on the staff of a well-paying journal would have been a great advantage. But she declined the offer, for the sake of continuing to advocate independently the cause she had at heart.

There are persons who say, and seem honestly to believe, that women who meddle with politics do so for want of something else to do. One such disinterested action as that of Althea Warburton overturns this theory.

Mildred's career might be said to run parallel to that of her friend. Occasionally only their lines united. With her necessarily, politics and

literature were subordinate to her business, and that business was after her own heart.

She was one of those people who are really cut out for a mercantile life. The details of office work, instead of being a drudgery, were an interest to her, and the position she had now achieved suited her exactly. It gave her scope sufficient, without personal liability. She never lived quite up to her income, but was able annually to lay by something, which she judiciously invested. Mr. Cook placed in her almost unlimited confidence, and regarding her simply as the successor to Mr. Walsh, he seemed quite to have forgotten that the fact of her being in his office at all was an infringement on old-established usage. Once he nearly committed an amusing mistake. Having determined to present her with a little testimonial on New Year's Day, he went into a silversmith's shop, and, looking round, said—

"I wish to buy some small article of plate or jewellery to give as a present."

"What would you like, sir?" asked the courteous shopman.

"I don't know. I am a merchant, and I want something to give as a mark of esteem to my confidential clerk. What would you recommend?"

"A silver snuff-box, sir, I should think, would be very suitable," was the reply.

"Oh! well, show me some, if you please."

An array of handsome silver snuff-boxes was displayed on the counter, and Mr. Cook had all but selected one, when the shopman said—

"And here is a plate on the lid, sir, so, if you please, you can have the gentleman's name engraved."

"The gentleman's?" exclaimed Mr. Cook. "Bless my soul! I quite forgot! No, no; of course a snuff-box will not do at all."

Mildred was quite satisfied with the degree of independence she had attained, and, if she ever formed a wish, it was that things might continue as they were. How often is that wish the precursor of change! When once we begin to settle down on our lees we are pretty sure to be roughly shaken up.

Mr. Cook's attendance at the office grew less and less regular. He was frequently absent from indisposition for several days at a time, and he usually returned after each illness looking older and more feeble. He complained of his head a good deal, and one morning a message was brought to the counting-house that Mr. Cook had died of apoplexy.

Probably no person ever died without leaving some work unfinished. Something that would have called forth the regret, "I should like to have lived a little longer just to see the end of ——."

In Mr. Cook's case the expression of such a wish would have been very natural, for the sake of his family. His capital was nearly all afloat, he had embarked recently in important speculations; and though there was every reason to believe that these would turn out well, since they had not been undertaken rashly, it would be impossible to wind up his affairs at the present juncture without great disadvantage to his heirs.

For some days the head clerk went about with a very thoughtful face. She contemplated a great step—nothing less than to carry on the business herself. Mildred would not have courted this change; far rather would she that things had continued in statu quo; but she felt that a crisis had come in her life, and that she must rise to meet it. Virtually she had conducted the business for some time; she therefore knew what she was about, and decided to take the plunge.

To effect an advantageous arrangement with the executors was not difficult under the circumstances. And so Mildred set up in business on her own account, as the representative of an important and long-established mercantile house in London.

CHAPTER XXV.

"THE LAW ALLOWS IT, AND THE COURT AWARDS IT."

MRS. HERNE was no longer an inmate of her husband's house; his refusal to give up an acquaintance that was an insult to her had brought about a separation. Not that he desired this climax; he was unwilling there should be such an esclandre in his family, and he sought to ward it off by holding over her the threat of detaining the children. And the cruel means answered his purpose. Mrs. Herne bore passively daily slight and insult long after the faintest gleam of love and esteem for him had completely vanished. But at last his misconduct came to such a height that she could not put up with it, and when he insisted on her receiving Miss Harvey at her house, then the final explosion came. Leonora, by her husband's desire, was sending out cards for an "at home," and he bade her send one to Miss Harvey.

"If Miss Harvey enters this house, I go out of it," was her reply, "so in that case you may have her to do the honours of your party."

This answer brought high words on his part,

in the course of which he so far forgot himself as to lift his hand against her. Yes, this gentleman, who was a member of our legislature, a man of family, and of large fortune, was, after all, mentally and morally degraded, since he condescended to use his masculine strength to treat a woman, his wife, with personal violence. After this Mrs. Herne told him—and not in the heat of passion, but deliberately, unanswerably—that she never again would live with him.

At the time of her marriage Leonora possessed two thousand pounds. That money was, in the eye of the law, his, it was no longer hers; but as she did not take quite the correct legal view of the matter, she now said to him, "Give me my two thousand pounds, and I will live upon the interest."

"And do you know," asked Mr. Herne tauntingly, "what is the interest of two thousand pounds? At the utmost one hundred a-year. How will you contrive to live on that fine income?"

"If I cannot live upen it, I will supplement it by taking in sewing, or by teaching," she replied. "I would rather not accept any maintenance from you."

The terms of their separation, however, could not be settled without the intervention of the

law, for a further difference arose about the custody of the children. Mrs. Herne felt that she ought to retain both.

"If the Court of Chancery," she said, "is, as it professes to be, a court of equity, and regards the laws of nature, it will recognise the right of a mother, which is sacred and inalienable, to the care of her own children."

"The Court of Chancery," retorted Mr. Herne, "will, if I mistake not, interpret the laws of the land, not the laws of *nature*," sneeringly; "and by the law of England a father's right to the custody of his children is absolute. Nay, more, if I die, I can appoint any guardian I please, to the exclusion of you altogether."

Mrs. Herne felt driven almost beside herself. She had just one hope. He did not wish to appear in court, to furnish a case for the journals of the day, and his wife knew this. She proposed a compromise—that they should agree each to keep one child.

"Keep the boy, who is your heir, not that you are fit to bring up a son, Henry; what kind of principles will you give him? But if it must be so, I submit. Keep him, and I will take my daughter."

"No," said Mr. Herne, "I will not part with Alberta. She is pretty, she is engaging, she amuses me."

So the case went before the Court of Chancery, and furnished one of the most interesting scandals of the season. From the social position of the parties public attention was naturally much excited, and the court was crowded with visitors, among whom were many ladies. Mrs. Herne was an object of general sympathy.

The little boy was only three years old, and the decision was that he should be left with his mother until the age of seven, after which, if the father chose to reclaim him, he could do so, though the judge expressed a charitable hope that before that period arrived, the parties would have effected a reconciliation. The girl, whose seventh birthday was just passed, was to remain with her father.

"At the same time," his lordship added, "a little girl of that age is better with her mother than elsewhere; you would do well, Mr. Herne, not to separate them."

Mr. Herne's demeanour reminded some of the spectators of Shylock in the trial scene of the "Merchant of Venice," "Is it so in the bond?" to every merciful suggestion. But, alas! in our English court of *justice* there was no clever young judge who could devise a way to evade the letter of the law, and prevent "the pound of flesh" being taken from nearest the victim's heart.

The children were brought into court, and a

murmur of sympathy was heard through the crowd as the little girl made an effort to reach her mother.

Mrs. Herne asked whether the child's wishes might not be consulted; "she is intelligent," she said, "and can speak for herself."

"Were she fourteen," was the reply, "she might be permitted to exercise a choice, but under that age the law gives a father the sole right to dispose of his children."

So Mrs. Herne learnt, what perhaps may be news to some other wives and mothers, that as regards the guardianship of her children, a mother's rights, in the eye of the law, are simply *nil.* Up to the age of seven they are left in her care, from consideration to *them*, it being taken for granted that a young infant would suffer by being deprived of maternal care. After the child comes to years of intelligence it is allowed a voice in the matter; thus the father and child each have acknowledged rights, the mother has none.

The question of maintenance did not occupy the court long; Mrs. Herne asked for nothing beyond the small sum she had brought her husband at her marriage, but Mr. Herne chose his son to have proper attendance; he agreed, therefore, to pay her a tolerably liberal allowance so long as the child remained under her care.

The case being concluded, Mr. Herne was impatient to get away. His carriage was waiting at the door, and he was prepared to depart with his daughter at once.

Mrs. Herne had to take then her last kiss and look at her darling. There was not a dry eye among the women in court; and not a few moist ones, to their credit be it recorded, among the men, as the mother and child, the latter frightened and sobbing, clung together before they were separated, probably for ever.

The following day Mrs. Herne received a letter from her husband's lawyer. The purport was, that Mr. Herne was naturally much annoyed at the legal decision, which had deprived him, for the meantime, of the comfort of his son. It was right she should be informed that as soon as the boy reached the age at which the father could enforce his claims, it was his intention to do so; she must be prepared, therefore, to yield him up on his seventh birthday.

Mrs. Herne was able to say, "Sufficient to the day is the evil thereof." It was not unlikely, she thought, that before four years had elapsed she would be done with this weary world. The appearance of her careworn face warranted the supposition. At the same time the warning made her feel on how brief a tenour she held possession of her boy, and she grudged every

day that passed as bringing her nearer to the fatal hour.

Mothers, in happier circumstances, watch their children's growth with pride and pleasure, but to Mrs. Herne the difference which almost every day witnessed in his size and intelligence, was a source of sadness rather than of joy. He was a fine robust boy; and sometimes she would say to herself with a sigh, "How big and strong he is getting. Time flies fast in spite of my misery. He will be torn from me before we know where we are."

She had taken a quiet lodging near some of her friends, and there she led a secluded, joyless life, interested in nothing except in the women's suffrage movement, because she knew that non-representation is at the root of all the wrongs which women suffer at the hands of the law. She was often urged to come forward as a lecturer on the subject, it being thought that her own bitter experience would give force and fire to her words. Mrs. Herne felt that she could lecture in public; that words, perhaps eloquent words, would come at her bidding; but, just because she was personally so deeply concerned, she objected to come prominently forward in the cause. It would seem, she said, that she advocated women's claims less on the broad grounds of abstract justice than from personal feeling, so

she restricted herself to giving such help as she could render privately, and chiefly by canvassing for signatures to petitions. That work she rather enjoyed. She would take the forms to perhaps a dozen houses in the course of the morning, and patiently explain the reasons why people were invited to sign the petition. Many a quarter of an hour did this lady spend sitting in the room of a working woman, or the back-parlour of a shop, explaining the tendency of the laws of England to interested, though perhaps ignorant auditors. Hundreds of signatures she obtained in this way. Usually she sent the sheets when filled to Miss Warburton, but sometimes she made them up herself into a book package, and forwarded them in her own name, with a note addressed to some member of Parliament, who had been her acquaintance in former days, asking him to present the petition and support its prayer.

So months passed on, and she had the consolation of feeling that she was not altogether a cumberer of the ground, when an unexpected blow descended, which severed the last tie that bound her to life. In the damp autumn weather, which caused much mortality among old persons and children, her boy fell sick of a low infantine fever. Neither medical skill nor his mother's prayers, as she hung day and night over his

couch, were of any avail, and after a few days' suffering he expired in her arms.

Mr. Herne was, of course, informed through his lawyer of the death of his son, and Mrs. Herne received, in answer, a message upbraiding her for the fatal catastrophe. The feeling of her husband with reference to the loss of the child appeared to be a rather curious mixture of resentment against her and against Providence.

The letter produced very little effect on Leonora, whose heart had been rendered callous to insults from that quarter. The death of the child, nevertheless, was a grief that crushed her nearly to the earth; she shut herself up from even her best friends, and no longer felt spirit to engage in any occupation. After a little while it occurred to her that the best thing she could do would be to retire from the world entirely, and spend the remainder of her days in a Protestant sisterhood. In the then morbid state of her mind the idea presented itself that her sufferings were a punishment for her sins. Perhaps, she reflected, she had hitherto been robbing heaven by devoting her time and thoughts to a political movement, instead of employing them in religious meditation and works of so-called charity. She would endeavour to deprecate Divine wrath by adopting for the future a life of austerity, prayer, and

devotion to the sick poor. She consulted no one on this resolution, for she knew that those whose opinion she most valued were utterly opposed to the principle of sisterhoods, and she did not wish to be dissuaded. She determined to call on the superior of a Protestant convent in London, and inquire whether the fact of her being a married woman was an obstacle to her being received into the community. She sent for a cab, and directed the driver to take her to the house of the Sisters of ———. On the way thither, however, a circumstance occurred which induced her to change her course.

The cabman, for his own convenience, drove through Hyde Park. It was late in the afternoon, and the park presented a scene of animation that was strangely out of harmony with her feelings. But it was not in her eyes altogether a gay scene. Leonora had learnt to look below the surface, and as one fine carriage after another passed her humble vehicle, and she caught sight of the gaily-dressed occupants, she thought, "They are not all happy! What secret sorrow there is in many of those hearts."

A very stylish little equipage flashed past—a low phaeton, with a pair of lovely ponies, driven by a lady, behind whom a servant in livery sat with his arms folded. Mrs. Herne started forward with an involuntary half scream, for

beside the lady, nestling among the fur and crimson wrappers, was her own little girl. The extravagantly-dressed woman, the child's fair face, were passed in an instant, and Mrs. Herne sank back more dead than alive. She was conscious of nothing until the cab stopped at its destination, and the driver came up to the window to ask if he should ring. He even may have been struck with the ghastly paleness of the face that met his view.

"I have changed my mind; I shall not get out here. Take me to——" and she named Mildred Randall's address.

What an interview that was! Seated by her friend, Mrs. Herne told Mildred of the resolution she had formed, adding that she had relinquished that intention for the sake of her child.

"I am tempted," she said, "to offer any terms, to put up with almost any indignity that affects myself alone, if only I can rescue her. How can Alberta" (and the tears coursed down her cheeks) "grow up even a tolerably right-thinking girl, trained under the eye of that woman? But," she continued, "the question is, does he now desire a reconciliation? May he not enjoy the liberty he has?"

Mildred was silent.

Mrs. Herne pressed her hand to her throb-

bing brow, "I cannot even think," said she. "Mildred, think for me, and advise me."

"I don't know what to advise or to think," replied Mildred, gravely, "unless you could, by any means, get possession of the child."

Mrs. Herne's large eyes dilated as she fixed them on Mildred's face. The words evidently suggested a new idea. "You mean get possession of her surreptitiously."

Mildred shrugged her shoulders. "If you cannot get possession of your own child by fair means, I think that you are quite justified in using artifice. When in the name of law such monstrous wrong is perpetrated as a child to be taken from a virtuous mother, and handed over to a vicious father, to be educated under a woman who is scouted from respectable society, why, in the interests of religion and morality, we are called upon to interfere. Such law is not founded on the principles of truth and justice, and has no claim on our obedience."

"Will you then help me, Mildred?" said Leonora.

"I will," said Mildred, firmly, and there was a dark gleam in her eyes which boded a resolution it would be difficult either to daunt or to turn aside.

"But consider well what you are promising. There will be risk to yourself. It will be reck-

oned kidnapping, I suppose. Good heavens! that one should have to use such words with reference to a mother's charge of her own child! Still, you may get into serious trouble."

"I am ready to brave the risk," answered Mildred, "even were I sentenced to imprisonment, I could endure it. I cannot say that I am anxious to be a martyr, yet such an affair would do an immense deal of good. The feeling of the whole country would be on our side."

"Then I accept your proffered assistance," said Mrs. Herne, "and Heaven bless you, Mildred. I, alas! can do nothing to show my gratitude."

But Mildred, it need hardly be said, wanted no reward. Her whole soul was roused to indignant revolt against the legal status of a wife and mother in England.

"It might be well," she observed, "to try fair means first. Suppose you were to communicate, either with Mr. Herne direct, or with him through his lawyer; representing dispassionately the injury which the child is sustaining by being deprived of her mother's care, and asking, for her sake, to have the charge of her. You might promise that he should see her as often as he pleased, under certain conditions."

"Will you write such a letter, Mildred?" said Leonora, "it might come with more effect from you."

"I would willingly, the only thing is that as I am likely to be called upon to help you in another way, the more I can keep in the background the better." And the force of this argument Mrs. Herne admitted.

As she reached the door, she turned back to say,

"In the event of his refusing to entertain the proposition, which I fully expect, would you advise me to offer to return to him, if he will receive me?"

"I should say not," replied Mildred. "It is by women condoning offences in men that immorality has come to the height it has. But you must decide that point yourself." Mildred's opinion coincided with Mrs. Herne's own feelings.

Within a few days, Leonora again called upon Mildred, to show her the answer she had received through the lawyer, in which the proposal was briefly declined. Mr. Herne, his legal adviser stated, was a fond and affectionate father, and it was unreasonable to expect that he could consent to part with his only remaining child.

The two ladies commented, as our readers can do, if so disposed, on the tenor of this note; the law, be it observed, is very tender of paternal feelings. Then Mrs. Herne said,

"This is what I expected. So now I have no alternative but war, and Mildred, you will help me ?"

"To the death," answered Mildred.

CHAPTER XXVI.

"OPEN, IN THE QUEEN'S NAME."

THE centre of a certain handsome square in London was, as is usual, laid out as a garden, which was chiefly the resort of the children and nursery-maids, who lived in the surrounding houses. Among these might be seen, nearly every day, a French *bonne,* in charge of one little girl. She was easily distinguished from the other nurses by her plain becoming dress, totally devoid of all attempt to ape the style of a lady, such as is usually the rage with her English compeers. She held little communication with them ; for being unable to speak their language, she preferred to sit apart from the groups whose gossip she could not share. With a Frenchwoman's love of the open air, she generally, in fine weather, came out earlier, and remained later than they. Their idea was to bring their children out for an hour or two ; her practice was to take her work, and spend the whole morning in the garden.

One fine day, it being towards two o'clock, the various parties of children and their attendants had dropped off, and the garden was almost deserted, except by the Frenchwoman and her solitary little charge. On the bench beside her was a heap of daisies, of which the child was forming a chain, by linking one stalk within another, chattering the while her pretty, fluent French.

At a little distance, separated by some shrubs, sat a lady, who intently watched these two. She appeared to be reading, at least she had a book open in her hand, but she followed with her eyes every movement of the child. This she was able to do unobserved, being seated in the background.

For long the little girl kept close to her *bonne*, either playing with the flowers on the bench, or contenting herself with gathering those which grew within a few yards. Presently, however, her search for daisies led her a little farther, and she wandered round a large clump of trees and evergreens. She was still, indeed, close at hand, quite within call of her nurse, though not within sight.

At that moment the lady rose, and walked towards the child, to whom she held out her hand.

"Alberta, have you forgotten me?" said she,

addressing her in familiar, reassuring tones. "I am a great friend of your mamma's. You have not seen your mamma lately, have you, dear?"

"No," said the child, hesitatingly, lifting a pair of pretty blue eyes.

"Do you not wish very much to see her?" asked the stranger.

A pained puzzled look came over the child's face. She said, colouring, and in a low voice, "Mamma has been naughty."

"Oh, no, that is a great mistake. They are very wicked people, whoever they may be, who have told you so. Your poor mamma is only very unhappy, Alberta, for want of seeing you. Would you not like to see her, and give her a kiss?"

"Yes," said the child, more confidently.

"Well, she is here now, just round that corner; come with me and I will take you to her."

"But nurse—"

"Do not fear, nurse shall not be angry; you cannot think how your mamma longs to see you, and to kiss you. It is quite close. Come, give me your hand, and I will take you to her."

And taking the shrinking hand of the half-reluctant, wholly wondering child, Mildred Randall led her quickly along the short path which terminated in a gate. There a cab was waiting. It was the work of a second; the child

was lifted in, and clasped in the arms of a lady, whose face was concealed by a deep crape veil. Mildred followed, the door was shut, and they drove off.

They had taken the precaution to desire the cabman to drive in a direction contrary to that in which they really wished to go. When they had proceeded some distance, they alighted, and dismissed the cab. Mildred's plan was to shelter the fugitives that night, at all events, in her own house. To this Mrs. Herne, at first, nervously objected.

"There will be a hue and cry before many hours are over," said she, "and your house is likely to be first searched."

"I think not," Mildred replied, "at least, the risk is less there than elsewhere. If you go to an hotel or a lodging, where you have no claim on the people, they will betray you on the first suspicion, for the sake of reward. Now, my servants are true as steel. My housekeeper has suffered bitterly herself. Her husband deserted her, and used only to return now and then to rob her of every shilling and stick of furniture she had been able to collect. Yet, no magistrate would grant her a protection order, as while he paid those periodical visits, though only for the purpose of robbing her, she could not prove she had been deserted two full years. At last, in

despair, she gave up keeping a shop, and came into my service. She is as anxious to hide from her husband as you can be. I really think," added Mildred, "we would do well to confide in Hannah, unreservedly. Gold, I am certain, would not tempt her to betray you. The other one I have sent out of the way."

It was evening, towards nine o'clock. Mildred's drawing-room was closed in, and the lights gleamed cheerfully on the crimson curtains, the white and gold paper, and on the group of ladies assembled. Mrs. Herne sat in an easy-chair with Alberta on her lap. From time to time she bent her head, and silently pressed her lips on the child's soft hair, as if to assure herself that it was not all a dream, that she held her safe and sure. Miss Warburton had been asked to come in to join in the consultation, and assist by her advice. She sat at a table on which were writing materials, she had just finished putting up two letters. They were both addressed to ladies in America.

"These," said she, rising, and handing them to Mrs. Herne, "will insure you hospitality on your arrival. The ladies are both energetic workers in the cause of women's emancipation. One I know personally, the other I have never seen, but I have corresponded with her. They are noble, high-minded women. I have intro-

duced you by the name you think proper to adopt, Mrs. Hill, a widow lady, who is anxious to find employment in America. You will judge, when you have made their acquaintance, whether or not to trust them with your real name and history. At any rate they will point out to you the best means for an educated woman of earning a livelihood."

"If I could get bread and water, it is all I require for myself," said Mrs. Herne; "I should be happy now I have got this creature. But for her sake I must try and make money."

"Well," said Miss Warburton, "there are many more openings in America than here. With your knowledge of music and languages, I have little doubt that you will find remunerative employment."

Encouraged by the success which had so far attended the attempt, and by the hopeful tone of her friends' conversation, Mrs. Herne, during the early part of the evening, was almost cheerful. But as the hours wore on, a visible depression stole over her spirits. She started nervously at every slight sound. At length she observed, apologetically,

"I have an irresistible presentiment of evil. I feel sure this evening will not go over quietly."

"You are nervous," said Mildred, gently. 'There is no reason why suspicion should attach

to this house. Children, unfortunately have been kidnapped in London before now."

Mrs. Herne did not urge her fears, she only grew more and more silent and dejected. Suddenly there was a loud knock at the street door.

"There," said Mrs. Herne, starting, "it is come! The very sound I have been watching for the whole evening."

"Fear nothing," said Mildred, soothingly, "it may not concern you. Hardly an evening passes but some messages are given in for me, and the servant will not open the door except on chain. She has strict orders."

Scarcely had she spoken, before Miss Warburton, starting from her seat, snatched Alberta from her mother's lap, and with a sign for Mrs. Herne to follow, vanished into the adjoining room, which was Mildred's bed-chamber, and communicated with folding doors; the key was heard to turn on the inside. A conversation was, meanwhile, going on below, and Mildred opened the door into the passage, to hear what passed.

"Is your mistress at home? I want to see her."

"What do you want?" was the cautious inquiry, across the chain, which prevented the door opening above a few inches. "Your name, please?"

"Never mind my name, I am a gentleman, and have important business with Miss Randall."

"How can I tell that you are a gentleman? You may be a robber for anything I know. There's many a bad character going about."

"Woman, don't be a fool," an impatient voice answered, "I am an acquaintance of your mistress's."

"I know better. My mistress's acquaintances send up their names, and don't come prowling about at this time of night."

Something like an oath was heard, then the words, "Will you open the door?" imperatively. "I have no time to waste talking, and I must see your mistress."

"Well, I don't think you can. She is not at home."

"Why do you tell that lie? You know she is at home."

"Well, she is particularly engaged, which is the same thing."

"Show me into the dining-room, then I will wait till she is disengaged."

"Not likely that I am going to show strange men into the dining-room, who refuse to tell their business. A pretty Flemish account of the silver spoons I should get, if I did!"

"Woman," in an imperious voice, "must I go and fetch a constable and a warrant? If you do

not open the door instantly, I shall go and procure one."

Mildred withdrew into the drawing-room, smiling at her servant's obstinacy, but next instant her heart seemed to stop beating, as sounds below told her that, by whatever means, whether by force or otherwise, the stranger had carried his point. The chain rattled as it was let down, and a man's step entered the hall. It ascended the stairs. Nearer and nearer it approached the drawing-room. Mildred was in no doubt as to whom she was to see. It was no surprise to her. It was just what she expected, when Mr. Herne stood before her.

She was standing in the middle of the room.

He bowed stiffly.

"You have a very disagreeable servant, Miss Randall; I had great difficulty in gaining admittance. She told me, falsely, that you were not at home."

"Had she said that I was not at home to Mr. Herne, she would have spoken only the truth," answered Mildred.

"You have reasons for not wishing to see me?" he inquired, looking at her in a penetrating manner.

"Certainly, I have reasons for being more surprised than pleased by a visit from you. Your conduct to your wife, my friend, is no secret

to me, and I tell you plainly, Mr. Herne, that I have no wish to reckon you an acquaintance."

"Really, I don't know why you assume this insolent tone, Miss Randall," said he; "I have never done you any wrong, that I am aware."

"No, you have only wronged my friend, and all women through her."

"For the matter of that, I have my own wrongs to complain of," said he. "My home has been desolated. My son, the heir of my name and my property, has been suffered to die, through the want, as I firmly believe, of paternal care; and now, my only remaining child has been kidnapped. And it is about that, as you probably apprehend, that I have come here to-night."

"What, you think I have kidnapped your daughter?"

"I think that her mother, who, by your own confession, is a friend of yours, has sought refuge with you. I believe that my daughter is here."

"Well," said Mildred, boldly, glancing round the room, "you see she is not here."

"I see she is not in this room, but there are other rooms in the house."

"I beg to assure you," said Mildred, decidedly, "that you will see no other room than this. I hold by the axiom, that every man's house is his castle, and I shall certainly suffer no intrusion into mine. If you wanted to search my house,

Mr. Herne, you should have come armed with a warrant, and a constable."

"I should certainly have done so, had I known you as well as I know you now, Miss Randall. I came here with pacific intentions. I came to warn you of the danger which you might probably not be aware you ran in harbouring a child who has been decoyed away from its lawful guardians; and I expected that your own good sense would have induced you gladly to wash your hands of the affair."

"I should be only too glad, I assure you, Mr. Herne, to wash my hands of any affair in which you are concerned," replied Mildred, "and, as I have already said, I have no wish to keep up any acquaintance with you. I request that you will now bring this visit to a conclusion. My servant will open the door for you. No, *that* is the way downstairs," she added promptly, as Mr. Herne attempted to gain the door of the adjoining room.

But the semblance of politeness was no longer useful to Mr. Herne, and his temper getting the better of him, he told her plainly that he was resolved to pass into the next room. Mildred placed her back against the folding doors.

"You had better use personal violence, Mr. Herne, and drag me from this door, for in no other way will you gain admittance to that room. You can certainly do so, for you are stronger

than I am, then I shall summon you for assault. I should like to have a witness, though. Hannah, come here."

Mr. Herne stood for a moment irresolute, then, as if a sudden idea struck him, he brushed past the servant on the threshold, and dashed downstairs.

No sooner was the coast clear than Mildred looked anxiously into the bedroom. It was empty. Her anxiety was speedily relieved by Hannah informing her that during the colloquy at the street door, three figures had glided downstairs, down also to the kitchen storey, and had, she supposed, made their escape by the back. On their departure she had deemed it best to admit Mr. Herne. It was well, however, that he had not gained admittance to the bedroom, where a little glove of Alberta's lay on the floor; Mildred picked it up and consigned it to the flames.

But the excitement of the evening was not over. Scarcely half-an-hour had elapsed before the street door was again assailed. Hannah again inquiring who is there, seemed inclined to demur as before about giving admittance, but this time there was no temporizing on the part of those outside. A sharp blow was given on the panel by a policeman's baton, and a gruff voice said, "Open, in the Queen's name!"

The door flew open at the magic words, and gave admittance to Mr. Herne, accompanied by a constable, who had a warrant to search the house. Mr. Herne was, of course, aware that time had been lost, and the fugitives afforded opportunity to escape. His only hope was that they would not anticipate a second visit, but remain where they were for the night, trusting that the immediate danger was past. The house, accordingly, was examined from cellar to garret, but no trace of a child's presence was found.

Mildred did not interfere, but remained passively in the drawing-room. There, at the conclusion of the fruitless search, Mr. Herne reappeared. She was seated by the fire, and took no notice of his entrance.

Planting himself in front of her, he said, "Now, Miss Randall, I know that you are implicated in this affair, and for your own sake I advise you to tell me what you know. Are you aware that by acting as accomplice in the abduction of a child from its lawful guardians you are rendering yourself liable to transportation, or imprisonment, for a term of two years, with or without hard labour? In a word, you are guilty of felony."

He paused for her reply. It was calmly spoken.

"I can tell you nothing about your child, Mr. Herne; I do not know where she is, and if

you stand there till doomsday you will get me to say no more on the subject."

Mr. Herne looked as if he was strongly tempted to strike her. His hands twitched spasmodically. "We will see," said he, restraining himself with difficulty, "whether in a court of law you cannot be made to say something more to the purpose."

The flush on Mildred's cheek and the fire that glowed in the depth of her eyes, showed that her blood was boiling, constrained though till this moment her manner had been. With a keenness equal to his own, she now said, "I believe it is a principle of English law to account a person innocent until he is proved guilty. You choose to take it for granted that I am implicated in the abduction of your child. Prove your suspicion."

"It will be proved to your cost, I have little doubt," said he, vehemently. "I will have you arrested on suspicion to-morrow."

"And I shall plead not guilty," she answered, calmly.

Mr. Herne was as good as his word. Mildred was charged with being "concerned in a conspiracy whereby Alberta Herne, a child under ten years of age, had been by fraud or force decoyed away with the intent to deprive her father, Henry Herne, of the possession of the said child,

against the peace of our Lady the Queen, her crown and dignity."

Mildred pleaded simply "not guilty," and left the defence in the hands of her counsel. And as there really was no evidence against her, not even circumstantial evidence, further than the probability that she might be involved, Mr. Herne utterly failed to substantiate his charge.

Not many days after the case was dismissed, Mildred, Mrs. Herne, and her daughter arrived in Liverpool by a late train, and found themselves at the Docks, where, close alongside the pier, lay a steamer that was on the point of sailing for New York. It was an American vessel, and the stars and stripes floated from the mast. The train had come in just in time to allow passengers to go on board at the last moment. Mrs. Herne, closely veiled, walked first along the plank that led from the shore to the steamer. Mildred followed leading Alberta.

On deck all was noise and seeming confusion. There was a crowd of persons; second-cabin passengers, encumbered with boxes and bundles, had not yet shaken into their places, and were sitting and standing in all directions, some exchanging last words with friends. Sailors were hauling at the ropes with the rude yet not unmelodious chants which sound so strange to a

landsman's ears. A smell of tar and sea-water pervaded the air. The night was dark and chill, and the sky obscured by masses of black clouds, which a crescent moon only in one spot fringed with silver. Any one accustomed to sea voyages would have found in the scene nothing but what is common under the circumstances, nothing to excite forebodings or cause depression. But Mrs. Herne was unused to the rough side of life, in one sense; she had always, until lately, had attendance, and in travelling had rarely been dependent on her own exertion. Now she was about to brave the danger of a sea voyage, alone, save for the helpless young life wholly dependent upon her. She was bound for an unknown land, under a feigned name, and the moment had come when she must part from the friend who had hitherto supported her courage. Her heart sank as she looked from the dark waters around to the night sky overhead.

"Oh Mildred," she gasped, "that I, a wife and mother, against whom there was never a breath of slander, should be driven in this way from my home and my country!"

Mildred, who was standing beside her on deck, holding Alberta by the hand, felt also a depressing influence from the surroundings. But she tried to speak cheerfully. "Keep up a brave heart, dear Nora," she whispered; "remember

God is over all, as much at sea as on shore, as much in America as here."

"He need be more," remarked poor Nora.

"You are leaving this cruel England," continued Mildred, whose patriotism was at a very low ebb, "for a new country, full of fresh young life, where there are new institutions; juster, if not perfect laws, and where you may bring up your child to be a better woman than she would have a chance of growing up here."

The anchor cable was being drawn up.

"I must go," said Mildred, as she saw others hastening to leave the vessel. "Once more God bless you, Nora." Choking tears prevented further words.

For a moment these two women, whom suffering and sympathy with suffering had united in so singular a bond, held each other in a close embrace, then Mildred tore herself away, and pulling down her veil to hide her emotion, joined the stream of people who were crossing the plank to go on shore.

Leonora strained her eyes after her till the last glimpse of her dress even had disappeared, then descended with her daughter to her cabin, which it was her intention, on the plea of seasickness, not to leave during the voyage. Mildred for her part took the night train back to London.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE RULING PASSION STRONG IN DEATH.

MILDRED had meanwhile quite lost sight of her eccentric acquaintance, Mr. Sutton. He had removed to a distant part of London shortly after the episode of his nephew's visit, and all intimacy had ceased between them. In fact, she had almost forgotten him until one day casting her eye over the obituary in the "Times," she read, "Died, aged seventy-eight, Mr. Edwin Sutton." She gave a kind thought to the memory of the old man, and wondered what had been the end of that strangely-wasted life; whether in his last illness he had allowed himself the comforts that money can procure, or whether the ruling passion had been strong in death.

The same evening she received by post the following note:—

"MADAM,—We have the honour to enclose you an intimation of the death of Mr. Edwin Sutton, and to request the favour of your presence at the funeral, which will take place from his residence on Friday the 20th instant, at three o'clock.—We are, madam, with much respect,

"Your most obedient servants,

"HOBBE AND NOBBE."

Mildred felt rather surprised that Messrs. Hobbe and Nobbe, or whoever they might represent, had troubled themselves to send her this communication. Since, however, she was bidden to the funeral she felt no unwillingness to pay the last tribute of respect to a man whom, with all his eccentricities, she had rather liked. Accordingly, she assumed a decent suit of black, and on the day and hour named, betook herself in a cab to the appointed place.

The appearance of the house was suggestive of the habits of its late occupant. There was about it a general air of dilapidation. Mr. Sutton never rented more than a couple of rooms, but it was obvious that here landlord and tenant had been of one mind as to repairs. There was an absence of paint where paint should be; the area gate was half off its hinges; several panes of glass were cracked, and all were so thickly coated with dust that it was an economical substitute for blinds. The door was opened by a servant-maid dressed in a new black cotton gown, and Mildred was shown into the dining-room, the scanty furniture of which was of the dingiest description.

Half a dozen gentlemen were assembled, all of course strangers to Mildred, with the exception of Alured Sutton, whom she observed a minute or two after her entrance on the opposite

side of the room. He looked anxious and cross, an expression which grief takes with some people, and in answer to her bow of recognition, he raised his eyebrows, and looked at her in a manner which plainly said, "You here!"

Mildred felt slightly uncomfortable, and doubted whether she was not out of place. She was the only woman in a room full of men; she was neither kith nor kin to the deceased, and the only person with whom she was acquainted clearly regarded her as an intruder. She began to regret having accepted the invitation, when a gentleman crossed the room and bowing before her, said, politely—

"Miss Randall, I presume? You received the letter I had the honour of sending you? My name is Hobbe."

Almost at the same moment, she was accosted by another voice, it was that of Alured Sutton, whose sneering tone was a great contrast to the courteousness of the lawyer's.

"Your presence on this occasion is an unexpected honour, Miss Randall. I always understood that only relatives or very intimate friends attended a funeral. I really am surprised you have taken this trouble for a man who can have been nothing to you."

It is not pleasant for even a strong-minded woman to be quite alone in a party of strange

gentlemen. Mildred felt, therefore, considerably indebted to the politeness of Mr. Hobbe, whose consideration made everything smooth for her. He remained by her conversing agreeably, and when the procession, a very modest one, was ready to start, he handed her to a mourning coach. His attention, without being obtrusive, was marked, and at the conclusion of the burial service he offered to reconduct her to the carriage.

"I shall go straight home," said Mildred, "so I wish you good-morning."

"Our business is not concluded," said he; "the testamentary disposition has now to be read. We are going to my chambers for that purpose."

"But the testamentary disposition is nothing to me," observed Mildred; "I came to the funeral merely from regard to the poor old man, and I am rather in haste."

In a somewhat pointed tone, the lawyer remarked, "It might be as well if you can spare the time. I recommend you, Miss Randall, to return with us."

Mildred yielded, and the party were soon reassembled in a private room of Mr. Hobbe's office.

It might have been expected that the parsimony which had become a monomania with Mr. Sutton would have induced him in the last act

of his life to save the expense of a lawyer's assistance, and give to the world some curiosity in the shape of a will. But in this one instance he acted at variance with his usual habits. His very love for his money induced him to omit no legal formality necessary to ensure his wishes being carried out. The will had been drawn up by a respectable solicitor, in whose hands it was deposited with instructions that it should be opened and read immediately after the funeral. These instructions Mr. Hobbe, the solicitor in question, now proceeded to fulfil, in the presence of the party gravely seated round.

One portion of the document Mr. Sutton had chosen to dictate himself, and the short extract, in his own words, we shall give.

"The money which is invested in the above-named securities I have amassed entirely by dint of personal thrift and industry, and I trust that after my death my heir and successor will do more good with it than I have done. The only blood relation whom I possess, to the best of my knowledge, is my nephew, Alured Sutton, only child of my late and only brother Alured. To prevent any feeling of injustice that might arise on his part, I declare that my sole motive for not choosing him as my heir is, that I have reason to know that his chosen companions are horse jockeys and gamblers; and without enter-

taining any personal ill-will towards him, I do not choose that the money, or any portion of it, which I have spent my life in accumulating, shall pass into his hands; with the risk, if not the certainty, of being dissipated and misapplied.

"I select as my heir Miss Mildred Randall, merchant in the city of London, a lady of whom I entertain a very high opinion. I leave to her my whole estate, amounting to upwards of sixty thousand pounds, to be at her absolute disposal, the only condition, or rather request, that I annex being, that she will not dispose of the said moneys or any portions of them in such manner as is contrary to the spirit of this bequest. To my nephew Alured——"

But here the reader was interrupted. A stir and a suppressed murmur of surprise had disturbed the audience during the reading of the above sentences, now one voice rose above the others. It was that of Alured Sutton, who, in a loud harsh tone, exclaimed—

"Stop! I don't understand all this preamble. You lawyers use so many words about everything, there is no making head or tail of what you mean."

A smile passed round the circle.

Mr. Hobbe observed, "I think every one else finds the meaning clear enough, Mr. Sutton.

This young lady, Miss Mildred Randall, is sole legatee."

"Damn it!" burst emphatically from the lips of Alured.

All eyes were, however, turned towards Mildred. She had grown perfectly white, and was too really astonished by the tenor of the will to be able for some seconds to speak. She felt as if the room was turning round with her. Suddenly collecting her ideas, she half rose from her chair, and said hastily—

"It is quite true that Mr. Sutton is his uncle's rightful heir. He has reason to complain. I have no claim whatever."

"You have no claim from relationship, it appears, ma'am," answered Mr. Hobbe, "but the law fully recognizes a man's right to dispose in any way he pleases of money which he has accumulated by his own efforts."

"The thing is monstrous!" exclaimed Alured, "that a man in his dotage should have it in his power to set aside a near relation in favour of a woman whose arts and cajolery——"

"Mr. Sutton," interrupted Mildred, "take care what you are saying."

"Care? Oh, yes, ma'am, I mean what I say. You think perhaps that I don't know, but I do know, how systematically you courted my uncle."

"Gentlemen," said Mildred, looking round, "this is extremely disagreeable for me. That I am as much—perhaps more astonished at the contents of this will than Mr. Sutton can be—that I am guiltless of having ever courted the favour of his uncle, I am ready to declare most solemnly."

Alured broke into a loud, crackling laugh.

"He used not to visit you of an evening, I suppose? You never invited him to sit by your fireside?"

"I suffered him to visit me, and to sit by my fireside, because I pitied him as a very solitary man."

"Yes," sneered Alured, "we can understand, it is not the first time that a solitary man has met with attentions from a single woman. You did not send him a pair of muffetees?"

"Anonymously I did. I had no intention that he should know from whom they came," said Mildred, with a calmness that was rather forced, for she felt agitated and uncomfortable. "My acquaintance with Mr. Sutton originated in an accident, and that it did not end where it began was his doing, not mine."

"Is that strictly true?" asked Alured, sarcastically; "his first call was not to acknowledge the gift of those muffetees?"

"I believe it was," said Mildred, and in spite

of her conscious integrity, she felt her colour rise painfully, for she perceived the gentlemen exchange glances between themselves. Alured also saw what was passing through their minds, and hastened to seize his advantage.

"Gentlemen, I put the case to you. You all were acquainted with my late uncle. You know how peculiar he was—how—I may say, unprepossessing in his habits and dress. Was he a man whose visits any woman would be likely to encourage apart from interested motives?"

"It would be satisfactory," observed a member of the party, "if Miss Randall did not object, to explain to us what first led to the acquaintance between herself and Mr. Edwin Sutton."

Mildred, who had recovered her self-possession, related the circumstances of her first meeting, adding, in conclusion, "I think you may see that I could have had no motive but charity in helping him on that occasion, when so far from knowing he was a man of wealth I even took him for a mendicant and offered him sixpence."

"And you were equally in the dark as to his real circumstances," inquired Alured, pointedly, "when you sought to renew the acquaintance by sending him a pair of muffetees?"

"Mr. Sutton," said Mildred, "I decidedly object to the insinuation you mean to convey by that mode of expression."

"I shall use the expression I consider appropriate, ma'am," retorted Alured, "without asking your leave. I repeat—Did you still believe him a pauper when you gave him those muffetees?"

"No; by that time I knew something of his real circumstances, but as I before stated, I sent them anonymously, and had no expectation that he would guess from whom they came."

A triumphant smile crossed Alured's face, the other gentlemen looked dubious.

Mr. Hobbe observed, "It is very possible that Miss Randall's delicacy makes her reluctant to speak unreservedly of the relations between herself and Mr. Sutton."

"What do you mean?" demanded Mildred, sharply, turning round on her quondam friend.

"Pardon me, no offence, but," addressing the other gentlemen, "it seems to me that this settlement need not be considered so extraordinary. Very possibly," and a smile lurked about the corners of the lawyer's mouth, "Mr. Sutton may have vainly wished Miss Randall to partake of his fortune during his life?"

"Permit me to ask, ma'am," said an elderly gentleman, deliberately, "did you refuse an offer of marriage from Mr. Sutton?"

"Really," said Mildred, impatiently, "it strikes me that I am being put on my trial in a

very singular manner. However, I need have no hesitation in answering your question. I certainly never did."

"There was never any—a—attempt at love-making on his part?"

Mildred was too much vexed to laugh, as she might have been inclined to do at another time; she merely answered shortly—

"There never was anything of the sort."

There was a pause.

"This discussion is premature," observed a gentleman after a moment. "We have not yet heard the whole of the will—there may be something important yet to come. The sentence you read last, Mr. Hobbe, was, 'I leave to my nephew Alured'—had we not better hear the rest?"

There was a general assent. The lawyer resumed—

"'I leave to my nephew Alured'"—the said Alured leaned forward eagerly expectant: there was a feeling of suspense as Mr. Hobbe turned the page—"'I leave to my nephew Alured my advice, that he renounce the companionship of gamblers and jockeys, and betake himself to some useful business, by which means he may, in due time, by his own industry, acquire the independence which I could not conscientiously leave him.'"

This legacy the recipient regarded as insult

added to injury. Alured fairly gnashed his teeth, and, turning upon Mildred, relieved his feelings by pouring upon her a perfect volley of abuse. He was angry, and he was coarse in his anger. He accused her of having practised every variety of artifice to ensnare his uncle. He declared that she would gladly have been his wife had not some remains of prudence in the infatuated old man saved him from the trap of matrimony.

This insinuation could not fail of being more deeply offensive to Mildred than all the rest. Looking appealingly round the circle, she said—

"Will no one here remind Mr. Sutton that he is—or ought to be—a gentleman, and that I am a lady?"

Mr. Hobbe came to the rescue.

"Come, Mr. Sutton, this won't do. If you think proper to dispute your uncle's will, the usual *modus operandi* is open to you; but this is neither the way nor the time to protest."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

HUNTING THE PREY.

MILDRED returned home in a very disturbed state of mind. Her thoughts were in a turmoil.

She had gone to that funeral, a couple of hours before, a comparatively poor woman, owning a very moderate balance at her banker's, and dependent for an income on her daily exertions. She drove home weighted with the responsibility of sixty thousand pounds.

And did she feel very elated? Far from unqualifiedly so. Fortune had come to her in the most tantalizing form, almost counterbalanced by disagreeables. Not alone the coarse aspersions of Alured, but the tone of the whole discussion had stung her deeply, nor could she but admit that appearances were against her.

The disagreeables of her situation, however, did not monopolize her thoughts, and, even during the drive home, she began involuntarily to lay plans for the disposal of her wealth. The visions which spontaneously rose before her were far from those of selfish gratification: almost her first thought was of the pleasure she would have in endowing her poor sisters. She pictured the astonishment and delight of Isabella and Georgina when they received each a gift that would make them independent for the rest of their days.

She thought, and she revelled over this idea, how munificently she would now be able to aid the various schemes for the benefit of women. She even went so far as to consider the amount

of subscription she would give respectively to the several objects.

But even while indulging these day-dreams, she had a strong sense of their unreality. She did not feel that the money would ever really come into her possession to dispose of as she pleased, and this impression strengthened as the evening wore on.

The fact was, that in Mildred's honest, upright mind there existed a secret conviction that she had no right to this fortune. She knew that she was not clear from the imputation of having taken advantage of the age and weakness of an eccentric old man to supplant his natural heir, and the idea of being thus suspected was insupportable.

Whether or not there is truth in the popular saying that money is the root of all evil, it certainly, in her case, was the cause of much disquietude. Her prevailing wish was to act conscientiously—to see her duty and to do it. But the case was not a simple one. Had it been in her power to solve the difficulty by dividing the inheritance with Alured, she would unhesitatingly have made the offer; but the terms of the will precluded this course. She felt tempted to wish that she had never seen Mr. Sutton, or that he had built a hospital or a monument with his money.

Trying to see the right course, and not being able to see it, she worked herself into a perfect fever. All night she lay tossing from side to side, thinking until she could think no more. Morning began to dawn before she had closed her eyes in sleep.

Suddenly, like an inspiration, with the coming day, a solution of the difficulty flashed into her mind. It seemed so clear and simple that she wondered it had not occurred before. No sooner admitted, however, than it had the effect of tranquillizing her mind, and while forming her plans she dropped asleep.

During the whole of the following day Mildred had a grave sense of increased responsibility, mingled with an inspiriting consciousness of having a great and interesting undertaking to carry out. It was not without an effort that she could tie down her thoughts to the routine of business that morning, but she went to her office and did her work as well as usual; for the power of concentrating her attention was one which Mildred had attained in a high degree, and it was the secret of half her success.

In the evening she received visits from two lawyers successively. The gentleman who first sent up his card was a stranger to her. He called on behalf of Alured, and was entirely in his client's interest.

He began by representing, in strong terms, the injustice of the will, and informed her that Mr. Sutton intended to raise an action in equity to recover his rights. "At the same time," he continued, "Mr. Sutton would be glad were it possible to come to some amicable arrangement. He feels towards you personally nothing but kindness and good-will, and he would willingly spare you the disagreeables of a lawsuit."

"Pardon me," interrupted Mildred; "Mr. Sutton can have no wish to spare me any disagreeables, nor does he feel towards me either kindness or good-will. His language and behaviour yesterday were such as, happily, a lady very seldom has to endure from a gentleman."

"We must make allowance," observed the lawyer, biting his lip slightly, "for expressions which may have escaped him under what all certainly must admit to have been unusual provocation. On calm reflection Mr. Sutton no doubt regrets his impetuosity. Indeed, I am authorized to offer you on his part an apology."

Mildred bowed.

"And," resumed the other, "though Mr. Sutton has, of course, a just claim to the whole of his late uncle's fortune, it would save considerable expense and delay could a lawsuit be dispensed with; my client is not unwilling to consent to a compromise. For instance, were

you to offer to divide the inheritance, I have reason to believe the proposition would not be rejected."

"Unfortunately," said Mildred, "I have no right to make any such offer. To be candid, I think myself that the will is hard on Mr. Alured Sutton. But his uncle had a right to dispose of his own property as he pleased, and to have his wishes respected. Had he chosen to bequeath his money to any public charity, no one would have disputed the validity of the will."

Before either had time to say more, another card was brought in, with an inquiry whether Miss Randall was disengaged, as the gentleman particularly wished to see her.

"Show him in," said Mildred, as she read the name. "You will excuse me, sir; this gentleman has called on business, and no doubt his time is precious."

The other looked annoyed at this interruption, but rose as Mr. Hobbe entered.

Mildred smiled to herself at the encounter between the two lawyers. Each bestowed on the other a furtive glance full of suspicion and distrust; but the slight recognition they exchanged was perfectly polite. They were gentlemen, members, moreover, of a profession which especially cultivates self-control and caution.

"Then, madam," said the first comer, taking a reluctant leave, "you will think this matter over, and communicate either with me or with Mr. Sutton himself. Be assured that the arrangement I have submitted to you will be for your own advantage."

"My communication with Mr. Sutton will be through my lawyer," answered Mildred; and, having bowed him to the door, she advanced to receive her second visitor.

"I have taken the liberty of calling, Miss Randall," observed Mr. Hobbe, accepting the seat she offered, "to inquire whether I can be of use to you. Mr. Sutton is very angry, and speaks of going to law. I know that ladies are generally frightened by even the most distant threat of legal proceedings, and I thought it not unlikely you might be intimidated into consenting to some disadvantageous compromise, which, allow me to say, would be a great pity."

"I have no objections whatever," answered Mildred, "to the case being referred to the Court of Equity, and if it be decided in Mr. Sutton's favour I shall acquiesce without a murmur. A legal decision on the subject would, in fact, relieve me from great responsibility. Do you think he will succeed?"

"No," was the reply, unhesitatingly, "I do not think he will even make the attempt. He

must know that he has not got a leg to stand upon. The only plea he could put forward is that of insanity, and that would be a very weak one under the circumstances. I suppose, during your acquaintance with the old man, you never saw any symptoms of unsoundness of mind?"

"Never the slightest," answered Mildred; "he was most peculiar, no doubt, but not more so than, I believe, any person would become who chose to indulge all his own whims and to cut himself off from society. But this will places me in a painful position, Mr. Hobbe. I am suspected, and not without apparent reason, of having acted a most unworthy part. I assure you that I felt so keenly all that was implied yesterday that I would gladly have handed the whole fortune over to Alured Sutton to clear myself from suspicion."

"Quite unnecessary scruples, my dear madam," exclaimed the lawyer; "if you choose to recognize the claim of Alured Sutton, I should say that were you to offer a fourth part it would be eagerly accepted."

"I dare say it might," answered Mildred, significantly, "but in the face of certain expressions in the will, I feel I have no right to make any such offer."

She drew out a memorandum-book, and read —"'The only request I make is, that Miss Ran-

dall will not dispose of the money or any portion of it contrary to the spirit of this will.' I consider myself bound by that sentence."

"You are right. Consent to no compromise," exclaimed the lawyer. "You have a legal title to the whole. Alured Sutton has not the ghost of a chance, and if he persists in going to law, the decision, which is sure to be in your favour, will probably carry costs."

"I am thinking," said Mildred, suppressing a smile, "not of the legal, but of the moral bearing of the question. The wishes of a testator ought to be respected. But if Alured Sutton has no claim to his uncle's fortune I, in another sense, have less, and I cannot sit down passively under the imputation of mercenary motives. My character is very dear to me, Mr. Hobbe."

Mr. Hobbe had ended his last sentence with quite a triumphant peroration, but now his countenance changed. He looked at her inquiringly, anxious for what was to follow.

"I look upon myself," explained Mildred, "simply as a trustee for this money, and I hope it will do more good now than during the lifetime of poor Mr. Sutton, or than it probably would do in the hands of his nephew."

Her companion was silent for a moment, apparently from surprise. After a pause he said, "Then, if I understand aright, you intend to

devote this money to some public charity. May I ask what ?"

"Not a charity," replied Mildred, "there are too many charities, but there is an object which I have reason to believe Mr. Sutton would have promoted during his life, had not his parsimonious habits deterred him. He once said to me that it would be a noble work to found a college for women. For a moment I really thought he might carry the idea into effect himself. Then his heart seemed to close. His love for his money was too strong, and he never reverted to the subject. Many persons," continued Mildred, "have felt within the last few years, that women ought to have better means of education than they possess, and an attempt has been made to raise money to found a college, but it comes in only in driblets; from all the wealth of England it has been found impossible to obtain by subscription even the few thousands necessary.* Now the work will be done, not by subscription, but by an individual. The institution will be called the 'Sutton College.'"

During this explanation, Mr. Hobbe's face lengthened more and more. At the conclusion he exclaimed—

"But my dear lady, sixty thousand pounds is a great deal of money. Really, it will be

* This was written before Girton College became a reality.

wasting the noble sum at your disposal to do nothing better with it than found a college for women."

Mildred had been speaking with great animation, carried on by her own interest in the subject. At these words her face grew suddenly sad and grave.

"Ah! Mr. Hobbe," she said, "you are like many people I meet with. Were this sixty thousand pounds devoted to found an additional college for boys would you call it wasted? Does any one cavil at the rich endowments of Oxford and Cambridge, of Harrow and Eton? But because it is for women only you deem the money wasted."

Mr. Hobbe looked down, for there was a reproach both in her eyes and in her tone which he did not much like to meet. He evidently, however, disagreed with her, and muttered that the case was different.

"I don't know," said Mildred, "whether you have any daughters of your own, Mr. Hobbe. If so, you are probably able to provide for them comfortably. But suppose you had to look forward to leaving them one day alone in the world dependent on their own exertions, would you not feel rather anxious about their future?"

The question evidently went home. "I have daughters," said the lawyer, "little girls, and if

I saw that a college would do any good to women——"

"Women," observed Mildred, "must always be at a disadvantage in the battle of life from their lesser physical strength. Is it fair to weight them in addition with artificial disadvantages, civil, educational, political? Statistics show that there are at the present day a vast number of women in England dependent on their own exertions. Ought not those women to have a fair field? Men are doing their utmost to keep them out of remunerative employments, and even when they do get a chance they are often unable to profit by it from want of thorough education."

Her remarks seemed to produce an impression.

The lawyer observed candidly, "You place this question in a new light to me."

For a few minutes he sat silent, as if turning over her words, then recalling his thoughts to the business of the hour, he rose, saying abruptly—

"Well, Miss Randall, I will keep you informed of the movements of the enemy. I don't expect you will be involved in litigation. Mr. Sutton must know that he would be merely throwing good money after bad, but any way in which I can be of use to you, pray command my services."

Mildred rose, and offered her hand. "I pro-

bably shall require some legal advice, Mr. Hobbe. If I am able, as I hope, to build this college, there will be a good deal of business to arrange, and I shall be happy to put it into your hands."

CHAPTER XXIX.

"THREE CHEERS FOR MISS RANDALL."

MR. HOBBE was right. Alured Sutton did not take any legal steps to dispute his uncle's will. He found no counsel willing to take up his cause on the terms that suited him. He contented himself, therefore, with swearing against his deceased relative, and circulating unfounded calumnies against Mildred. One of these reached her ears, whereupon she instructed Mr. Hobbe to threaten him with an action for defamation of character, which prompt measure silenced Mr. Alured.

From the sum at her disposal, for which she persisted in regarding herself simply as trustee, she deducted three thousand pounds. One thousand she gave to each of her sisters. It would, she felt, have been quite in accordance with the spirit of Mr. Sutton's will had she given them a great deal more. But Mildred's feelings with regard to this money were very sensitive.

She did not choose to put it in the power of any of her detractors to say that her family, though not herself, had benefited to any large extent. One thousand pounds, after much consideration, she presented to Alured Sutton, stipulating that it must be regarded as a voluntary gift on her part, not any attempt to compromise the claim he put forth. As might have been expected, the gift was at first scornfully rejected, and some very disagreeable letters both from himself and from his lawyer were the consequence. But Mildred was acting on principle throughout the whole affair, and it made no difference to her whether he was grateful or the contrary. She told him that the money lay at a banker's in his name and he could take it or leave it as he pleased. After a time he condescended to take it.

All this greatly worried Mildred, but the vexed question was settled at last, and as a counterbalance to her annoyance, she found almost unalloyed pleasure as soon as she commenced arrangements for carrying out her great project.

She got in plans and estimates for a women's college, and purchased a site in a convenient locality. The time, she reckoned, would come when the institution would be furnished with a full staff of duly qualified lady professors, but

for the meanwhile she knew that she must depend on the co-operation of men connected with either Oxford or Cambridge, and she considered this point in choosing the site. As the building was to be a memorial for posterity, she deemed it fitting that the edifice should be not only handsome and substantial, but on a scale far more than commensurate with the number of students who were likely during even the next several years to matriculate within its walls. Moreover, she firmly believed that in this case supply would create demand. Many women, she felt sure, stifle noble longings for full and free intellectual development on account of the difficulties that beset their path. Offer women facilities for obtaining a university education, and hundreds, who now seem indifferent on the subject, would wake up as to a new intellectual life. The design she selected was in the form of a quadrangle, one or two sides of which might be finished and occupied before the whole was completed.

Mildred had no desire either of courting or of avoiding publicity. She purchased the site, consulted with architects, corresponded with professors, and at her leisure drew up a constitution for her college, all with the quiet independence that uniformly characterized her proceedings. But the presentation of so large a

sum for a national object attracted attention. It woke up the public mind to believe in a college for women, on which question Englishmen, and Englishwomen, alas! had been very sceptical. They had declared that such an institution was, in the nature of things, impossible; and by withholding the necessary funds, insured the fulfilment of their prophecy. But a donation for building and endowment of sixty thousand pounds worked a remarkable change in public opinion. The very persons who had refused, or given reluctantly, a five-pound note, so long as the money had to be collected in driblets, and while the college appeared but an institution in the air, were now eager to participate in a work which promised to redound to the honour of those connected with it. Three scholarships were offered of seventy pounds a year each, tenable for three years, and a lady begged to be allowed to give a gold medal to be competed for in mathematics.

Nearly every newspaper gave from time to time a paragraph, longer or shorter, to the intended women's college, and in an illustrated journal that enjoys an extensive circulation, there appeared a biography of Mildred, accompanied by her portrait, enlarged and engraved from a carte de visite. Her birth and parentage were given as pieces of information in which the

public was supposed to be interested. Her reverse of fortune, and her search for employment when she first went to London, together with her ultimate success, all were described, more or less correctly. From this written sketch Mildred had the satisfaction of learning that she was an "enterprising lady of distinguished talent, whose career had been remarkable." Who was her biographer, or how he came by his knowledge of her antecedents, she never heard.

She was, however, only partially gratified by the publicity thus attained. She knew that to be in any degree an object of attention is, in this ill-natured world, to be a mark for severe criticism; and Mildred, whose taste was to follow at all times the dictates of her own "sweet will" without rendering account to any one, felt that she was likely to be less a free agent than formerly.

She took advantage of the tide while it was in her favour, and anxious to omit nothing that could tend to confer prestige on her college, she determined to ask a royal princess to lay the foundation stone. The request was proffered in due form, and was granted in the most gracious manner.

The auspicious day arrived, and the sun shone on the ceremony both literally and figuratively.

When Mildred, accompanied by Miss Warburton and Alice, drove up to the spot in an open carriage, they found a large concourse of spectators assembled. There were the carriages of most of the neighbouring aristocracy, and those of several magnates from a considerable distance, the anticipated presence of Royalty no doubt conspiring with the interest felt in the object itself to draw people together. The ceremony commenced by a Broad Church dignitary, who had done a good deal to promote the higher education of women, reading the hundred and thirty-sixth Psalm, together with a prayer appointed for the blessing of Heaven.

In the cavity prepared for the stone there was placed a bottle, containing, as usual, coins of the realm, a parchment, on which was inscribed the date, the object for which the edifice was erected, viz., the "intellectual and social elevation of women," together with the names of several persons in whose presence it was stated her Royal Highness Princess —— did solemnly lay the foundation-stone.

Mildred had spent many a happy day since what we may call the commencement of her career, dating, curiously enough, from the day when she was thrown nearly penniless on the world, but it may be questioned whether she had ever been happier than on this occasion.

She already, in imagination, saw the fair structure that was speedily to rise on this foundation; she saw it filled with the flower of English girlhood, she thought of the women who would go forth from its walls qualified to make their way successfully in the professions of their choice, and who with powers disciplined and developed, would, no doubt, in many instances force their way into professions at present jealously closed against women. Energetic ladies, all honour to them! have already shown what can be done by perseverance, and once let education, meaning by the word trained capacity, become the rule instead of the exception among women, and they must take different and higher ground. Trade unions and professional cliques will be unable to withstand them. Their civil and political rights cannot then long be withheld. They will combine among themselves in a way they have never yet done, and will make their own terms in the world. That day is approaching; it is a mere question of time.

The princess having spread some mortar with the silver trowel presented to her, made a short, graceful speech, expressive of her cordial sympathy with the object of the college, which she believed was destined to mark a great era in woman's history. She earnestly hoped that the wishes of the generous foundress would be fully

realized, that every prosperity and success might attend — her royal highness hesitated for an instant, then supplying the name, added, the "Randall College."

The last words of the princess placed Mildred in an unexpected dilemma. In accordance with the views which had influenced her throughout, she had determined to call the institution the "Sutton College," but she doubted whether it would not be a breach of etiquette to alter the name given by royalty.

She thought it best, therefore, to accept the honour thrust upon her. But in her own speech which immediately followed, she very gracefully disclaimed any merit in the undertaking, she was merely carrying out, she declared, the wishes of one who was no more.

The ceremony being concluded, the princess took her departure amid loyal cheers, which had scarcely subsided when a gentleman on horseback called out—

"Three cheers for Miss Randall!"

And Mildred drove away with the voices of the crowd ringing in her ears.

But Mildred's life was so full and rich that no one interest could long monopolize her attention. She had to turn her thoughts often very rapidly from one subject to another.

On her return home, with her mind full of the ceremony just described, she found a letter from Mr. Walsh, containing a proposal of partnership. His business was in a flourishing condition, but it was very similar to that to which Mildred had succeeded from Mr. Cook, and he represented that the two might with mutual advantage be combined.

Mildred had never entertained the idea of taking a partner, but this proposal commended itself to her.

She had the highest opinion of Mr. Walsh's judgment and ability, and she knew by experience that he and she could work together. She took a day to weigh the proposition, to be sure that she did not overlook any possible objection, and decided to accede to his views.

CHAPTER XXX.

MRS. GRUNDY'S DYING GROAN.

"Now, Althea, put away your statistics. We must have a talk. We shall not have many more opportunities, for I am off on my travels in a week or two, and there are a lot of things to settle."

So spoke Mildred as she rattled into Miss Warburton's office, about eight months after the events last recorded. Althea was seated at her desk, surrounded with proof sheets and blue books, her normal condition her friends consi-

dered. She resigned herself, however, to the interruption with very good grace, saying, "What Miss Randall decrees must come to pass. Well," as she wiped her pen, "what have you got to say?"

"First about the college. Everything is going on splendidly. It really is most encouraging. I have letters nearly every day from the parents of girls who wish to matriculate, and many of the professors whom I have asked to deliver lectures are so kind. We shall have a distinguished staff to begin with."

"Have you fixed yet on a lady principal?" asked Miss Warburton. "That is a very important point. The success of the college will in a great measure depend on whom you choose."

"I feel that," said Mildred. "I will have no one in whom I cannot place implicit confidence. It is therefore necessary that the emoluments of the post shall be such as will make it worth while for a woman of first-class attainments to accept it. The funds of the college allow us to be liberal, so I intend the income of the lady principal to be eight hundred a year."

"That is very handsome," remarked Miss Warburton.

"I am glad you think so," said Mildred, "for I have come this morning to ask you to accept it."

Miss Warburton had obviously never thought of herself in connection with this remunerative

office. But she only said gravely, after a moment's silence—

"It is a post of great responsibility."

"For that very reason I want you to accept it. Just because it is so responsible it must be in the hands of none but a thoroughly competent person. The whole success of the college, I believe, will depend on who is at its head during the first few years."

Still Miss Warburton was thoughtfully silent.

"Why not take it yourself, Mildred?" were her first words. "You might make an arrangement with Mr. Walsh, and become a sleeping partner in your present business."

"Yes, my own education is so perfect," said Mildred, ironically.

"You have the best part of education," answered Miss Warburton; "you can think, and you can reason. But—"

"Now, Althea, no *buts*. I have set my heart on seeing you at the head of my college. Everything shall be done to ensure your comfort. You shall have a charming set of private apartments. I will superintend their arrangement myself. You can fix your own hours for giving your lectures, and choose the subjects you prefer. You will be quite independent. Come, say at once that you consent, and set my mind at rest."

The flush of grateful pleasure that tinged Miss

Warburton's cheek proved, if any proof had been wanting, that kindness was not thrown away upon her—that she was not deficient in sensibility. She merely said, however, in a very undemonstrative tone, "Well, I consent, and I hope that you will not have occasion to repent your choice."

They had then a long, and what both felt to be a very delightful, conversation about the prospects of the college and affairs in general. Presently Miss Warburton asked, "Have you definitely fixed on eighteen as the age of admission for students?"

"Yes, you see we don't want them until their preparatory education is finished. The college is for young women, not for children."

"Of course; you are quite right. But poor Alice will be more distressed than ever now. She is so sorry that she will not be eligible to matriculate for three years, and when she hears that I am to be principal, she will be broken-hearted, poor child."

"I have already been thinking about Alice," said Mildred. "She is so well grounded that she is more than on a footing with most girls of eighteen. Supposing she can pass the preliminary examination, I think we must make an exception——"

"No, no, that would never do," interrupted

Miss Warburton. "Nothing of partiality must be shown, especially in favour of a niece of the principal. You must be the first to submit to your own rules, Mildred."

"How very much Alice has changed," said Mildred; "that slender, thoughtful young lady is not a bit like the chubby child I used to tease and play with."

"She has become very studious," remarked Miss Warburton.

Mildred was at this time about to carry out a project from which she expected great pleasure. She had often regretted that her knowledge of life was limited to England, and having now a partner who could be safely trusted to look after the interest of the firm, she determined to devote twelve months to travelling on the Continent. She needed recreation. Since the commencement of her mercantile career she had never taken above a week's holiday at a time, and her health was beginning to suffer from such unremitting attention to business.

When she first mentioned the scheme to her sisters she had to combat the old style of argument. "To travel on the Continent by yourself, Mildred, that would be very improper"—a last feeble attempt on their part to resuscitate the authority of Mrs. Grundy. But Mildred silenced it, once and for all.

"Do not bring up that attenuated spectre to me," she said; "I have heard her dying groan long ago. But seriously consider how natural it is that I should wish to enlarge my experience. There is scarcely, I believe, a woman in England who has not moved about more than I have. I have actually never crossed the Channel. I am worse off than Georgina, who, we know, did 'acquire French partly in Paris.'"

"Oh, Mildred," exclaimed poor Georgina, deprecatingly, "if you only knew how often I have felt ashamed of that advertisement."

"I know, I know," said Mildred, good-naturedly; "I was joking."

"But why not join some family party, Mildred," pursued her eldest sister, "and travel respectably?"

"Because as an adjunct to a family party I should be dependent instead of independent, which would not suit me."

"Take a *dame de compagnie* then."

"More trouble than she would be worth! No, I intend to be a veritable Bohemian for twelve months, and wash my hands for that time of all my present concerns. Mr. Walsh will look after the business, Miss Warburton will take care of the college, and I shall tell Althea to send me no reports of the Association. I want to hear nothing while I am away about women's suffrage,

or anything of the sort. I shall think only about seeing pictures, and churches, and scenery, and learning to speak French and German. Oh, don't I intend to enjoy myself! I do believe I am the happiest woman in the world!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

BOHEMIANISM.

HAPPY the woman who can dispense with superfluous luggage in travelling! Men—single men—are much to be envied in this respect. Such had always been Mildred's opinion, and she determined to start on her travels as unencumbered as any young man could be. One portmanteau was all she took; of dresses it contained but two—one to change with that she had on, in case of getting wet, and a better one to wear at the table d'hôte. When these got shabby they were to be discarded, and replaced by others. The style of dress she affected compressed easily; the plain skirt and jacket folded flat, and took up little room.

We are not going to accompany Mildred throughout her tour.

"A youth light-hearted and content,
I wander through the world,
Here Arab-like is pitched my tent,
And straight again is furled."

But could we only give an idea of her enjoyment!

People who nearly every year run over to the Continent, who from childhood have been familiar with the favourite resorts of tourists, can form little conception of the fresh interest with which Mildred visited celebrated towns, beautiful scenery, picture galleries, all for the first time, at an age when taste and intellect were matured, and with eyes open to appreciate everything. She had laid out a plan for her own guidance, to which she adhered or not as she found convenient. When she came to a place where there was much to see, and that proved agreeable, she remained some time. Having twelve months at her disposal she was not obliged to hurry on. When, on the contrary, she did not care for a place, she paid her hotel bill and was off at an hour's warning.

One afternoon she arrived at a Swiss hotel just in time for dinner. Opposite to her at the table d'hôte was a young man on whom her appearance seemed to make an impression. He looked very young, having no vestige of either beard or whiskers; a fair, sunburnt complexion, and light curly hair. He wore a turn-down collar, a silk necktie, fastened with a Death's-head pin, and a light summer paletôt. As

Mildred took her seat he fixed a glass in his eye and coolly scrutinized her from head to foot.

It was Mildred's wont, from the day when she snubbed Alured Sutton at the railway station, to exhibit considerable hauteur whenever she encountered anything like forwardness. Accordingly she returned the cool stare of this youth with a very defiant look. He smiled, as if amused by her evident displeasure, but withdrew his eyes, and leaning one arm over the back of his chair, sipped his tumbler of claret, and did not again seem aware of her presence. From time to time he joined in conversation, speaking English, French, and German with almost equal facility, though it was evident that the former was his native tongue. Suddenly, as he changed his attitude, Mildred saw, to her astonishment, that the supposed young man was a young woman. The masculine attire descended only so far as the waist, and terminated in an alpaca skirt.

This unexpected discovery caused Mildred to regard her vis-à-vis with as much attention as that lady had bestowed upon her, and there was something in the countenance of the girl (for she was not much more) that attracted and pleased her in spite of a certain feeling of disapprobation inspired by her dress and attitudes. The expression of the face was frank and good-

tempered, and the well-developed brow, off which the light hair was jauntily brushed, would have satisfied a phrenologist. The thought passed through Mildred's mind: "That girl has a good face, what a pity she has the bad taste to ape the dress and manner of a man."

The object of this reflection might have retorted, "Those who live in glass houses," &c., for to describe it, there was not much difference in the style of their dress. Mildred also wore her hair short, a jacket, and skirt of walking length, and plain linen collar and cuffs. But her costume was obviously adopted simply for convenience. In the cut of her clothes there was none of that affectation of masculine fashion which the dress of the other betrayed in every detail.

When dinner was over, and some of the company assembled in the salon, this lady came up to Mildred and said, frankly, "I saw that you thought me very rude at dinner. What did you take me for?"

Mildred hesitated an instant, then said, "I took you at first for a forward young man."

The other looked pleased rather than offended. "Now that is the kind of straightforward answer I like," said she.

They continued to converse, and before half a dozen sentences had been exchanged each felt

that she was speaking to a congenial spirit. There is a freemasonry between persons whose minds chime in harmony, and so there was in this case. They exchanged cards and an expression of pleased surprise escaped the lips of each.

"I have heard of you," said Mildred, with a smile, for she read the name of an author not unknown to fame. "I admire some of your works."

"And I admire yours," rejoined the other, in the same tone. "I thought your building that college was such a grand public-spirited work."

Before they separated, Mildred had promised to call upon her new acquaintance, whose parting words were—

"I am very glad that we have met, Miss Randall; I took a fancy to your face at dinner."

Mildred might, with some reservation, have returned the compliment. So does like take to like.

Miss Gabrielle Ducasne was travelling alone, much as Mildred was herself doing. When the latter paid her promised visit, she found her new ally lounging on a couch, in front of an open window, enjoying indolently a fine mountain view and a cigarette.

"Have a weed?" said she. "You smoke, Miss Randall?"

"No, I don't," replied Mildred, shortly, "it is ruin for the teeth."

"Ah, you have fine teeth, I see," said the other, carelessly, "so you are proud of them, and take care of them; quite right."

"That has nothing to do with it. If I had bad teeth I should think there was the greater need to take care of them. But apart from that reason, I look upon smoking as a bad habit. It must run away with a great deal of money, and what is the pleasure?"

Miss Ducasne raised herself on the couch and spoke with energy.

"Do you think," said she, "that if there was no pleasure in smoking, it would ever have become the fashion it is in all countries, and with all ranks? The poor man will rather go without his dinner than without his tobacco. The rich man, though he is told often that his health depends on his abstaining, will rather sacrifice his health than his cigars."

"I know that," said Mildred, "but what is the pleasure?"

"A cigar," pursued Miss Ducasne, "warms you if you are cold, it cools you if you are hot. It soothes you if you are excited, it cheers you if you are dull. It is a companion in solitude—a comfort always."

Mildred laughed at this tirade in favour of smoking.

"But I think that it is paying men too great a compliment to imitate them," said she; "above all I would not imitate their objectionable peculiarities. I always speak plainly."

"Of course, so do I, and I must say that I object to hearing it said that women who smoke do so in imitation of men. They are merely asserting their right to an indulgence of which men have had, in a great measure, the monopoly. People are too fond," continued Miss Ducasne, pettishly, "of accusing women of imitating men. Some people, I know, say that I do so in my dress, but nothing can be more untrue. Men have hit upon a style of dress infinitely more convenient than ours, and I choose to consult my comfort."

Mildred and Miss Ducasne mutually sought each other's society amid the crowd of company at the great hotel. Sundry excursions made together; a ride on mules up a mountain; a night passed together at a châlet—discomforts and pleasures shared in common, greatly promoted intimacy; and when, after a few weeks, Mildred mentioned that she intended to proceed elsewhere, Miss Ducasne said—

"I have nothing to keep me here either. I

am travelling pour passer le temps. I wonder if we joined company whether we should quarrel?"

"Such is often the consequence of too great intimacy," observed Mildred, laughing. "Many a friendship is broken off by the attempt to live together; though now and then one is cemented, and that result is greatly to the credit of both parties."

"I wonder if we should quarrel," repeated Miss Ducasne, reflectively. "Are you easy to get on with, Miss Randall?"

"I don't know that I am, particularly," replied Mildred, who saw there would be advantages in Miss Ducasne's plan, but at the same time had no inclination to rush into an arrangement of which she might repent; "I may, however, say this much for myself, I am very good-tempered so long as I am not opposed."

"Oh, then I can say more for myself, for I am always good-tempered, even when I am opposed. What do you say, shall we try the experiment?"

"I am ready," replied Mildred, "with this premise. I tell you frankly that I am not perfect, therefore I shall not expect to find you faultless. If I am mistaken, so much the better, but we will agree to bear and forbear, when necessary."

"Agreed," said the other, "we will live and let live."

They then had recourse to their maps and railway books, and laid out their route together.

Imagine these two young women, possessed of unbroken health and spirits, intelligence, sufficient money—they could not but enjoy themselves.

Miss Ducasne was armed with a note-book and sketching block, and jotted down all that was worthy of record. Mildred neither sketched nor took notes.

"You make me feel quite lazy," she said, "but this is my holiday. I work hard when I am in London, and half my pleasure in travelling would be gone if I felt it incumbent on me to keep a journal or try to draw."

"Of course, why should you? Our lines are different. Book-making is my métier, and I must collect material."

It was not, however, exactly book-making that was Gabrielle Ducasne's speciality; it was writing for magazines. Her articles were miscellaneous, pointed, and occasionally rather too highly spiced. She was connected with more than one periodical, and she said to Mildred—

"It is not a bad thing, I can assure you, to be on the staff of one of those magazines. I never get less than half a guinea a page, and my articles are written often with very little trouble. I don't say," she added, "that I would like to

depend for my living on writing—I have enough to give me a dinner every day without supplementing my income, but I like the dinner to be a good one, and my coffee, cigars, and ices all come out of the editors' pocket."

Her drawings were produced in much the same way as her pen and ink sketches. Some artists are insufferable to travel with; those who remain stationary for hours, regardless of weather and their companion's impatience. Miss Ducasne did nothing of the kind. When she was struck with a bit of scenery, an effect of light and shade, or a picturesque costume, out came the sketch-book, and a few bold artistic strokes would commemorate the scene.

One day, Mildred took a fancy to a slight sketch which had been very quickly, and with apparent carelessness, dashed off, and she said, "I wish you would give me this."

"Not I, indeed," was the reply; "I am going to turn it into money. I shall finish or copy it at leisure, and sell it with the copyright of a nice little article, which I shall make out of this day's excursion."

Both were inclined to admit that they had made a good bargain in each other's company. They were more really independent than they had been before, since two could go to many places when one could hardly have gone alone,

and as they were alike bent on seeing as much as possible, their wishes harmonized. With all this there were points on which they were very dissimilar. Mildred was independent, Miss Ducasne was fast. Mildred, with the good taste which characterizes nearly all the ladies of the "women's" movement in England, never wantonly outraged public opinion. Miss Ducasne was eccentric for the mere sake of eccentricity.

They were furnished with many good introductions, and each benefited by the letters of the other. The first occasion on which they accepted an invitation for an evening, Mildred felt that as she was to go out, she must be properly attired, so she inquired for a good dressmaker, and ordered what was suitable. She felt curious to see in what degree Miss Ducasne would think proper to modify her usual costume. When the latter made her appearance, prepared for what was to be a large reception, Mildred could not help looking at her with mingled amusement and annoyance. She had exchanged the cloth jacket she wore every morning, for one of the same make, but of blue velvet with a narrow edging of gold cord, and ornamented with elegant filigree buttons, which she mentioned she had picked up two years before in Spain. In place of her waistcoat she wore a fine white embroidered chemisette. Mildred was not

quite pleased; she would rather, at least, that her companion had dressed like other ladies, but she remembered their compact to "live and let live."

In the course of the evening, Miss Ducasne came up to her in the crowded salon, laughing heartily. "Do you see that elderly party in the white choker?"

"Yes, an English chaplain, some one told me."

"Well, he and I were talking, and somehow our conversation turned on various social institutions, and he said to me, 'I'll tell you what, young fellow, I hope you don't air those opinions before ladies!' That is better, is it not, than even your mistake at the table d'hôte?"

Mildred answered severely.

"There is no harm in me," said the other, "only I like to frighten people sometimes, and to amuse myself."

Mildred occasionally remonstrated with her companion on the score of her eccentricity. She could speak plainly without fear of giving offence, but neither did any arguments produce the slightest effect. Miss Ducasne would laugh and take her own way. The rôle of Mentor was not, however, to Mildred's taste, and she very rarely enacted it.

Sometimes she and Miss Ducasne would say laughingly to each other that they were peri-

patetic philosophers, studying men and manners, and that it was their duty to see as much as they could. On this excuse they went wherever their curiosity prompted. The doom having not yet gone forth against the German public gaming tables, they more than once of an evening walked through the saloons at Homburg and Wiesbaden, and at the latter place Mildred saw two old acquaintances, a gentleman and a lady. The former was Alured Sutton, who was very speedily relieving himself of the burden of her one thousand pounds. He looked absorbed in his pursuit, and his face varied with every change of luck. Now excited, animated with a gleam of wild hope when fortune seemed to take a turn in his favour; clouding while his lips muttered curses, when, as more often happened, it went against him. Beside him at the table was an English lady, whose calmness and self-possession was a great contrast to his excitement. A slight, rather insignificant little figure, in a limp black dress, yet one of the coolest hands in the room. Mildred scarcely needed to see her face to recognize Mrs. Myrtle; unchanged, and looking as much at home as she could do in her own drawing-room.

Mildred watched her stake a single coin, and happening to pass the table half an hour afterwards, saw her sweep together a heap of gold.

Miss Ducasne also regarded the proceeding with looks of rather greedy interest.

"Is it not hard," she observed, as they left the room, "that while exemplary people, like you and I, have to toil for our money, and by our honest exertions can often make so little, that woman coins gold?"

A somewhat similar feeling had been raised in Mildred's mind by the sight of Mrs. Myrtle's golden harvest.

"But after all," she answered, "it must be a very uncertain resource. I should not wonder to see Mrs. Myrtle some day singing in the streets for halfpence."

At one place where they wished to make some stay, the hotels being crowded, they agreed to save their money and take lodgings. They had here no introductions, and knew no one. Nevertheless, they enjoyed the change of being in private apartments very much. They dined every day at a different restaurant, went about independently, and saw everything.

One evening there was to be a fête in some public gardens, with illumination, fireworks, and music. The advertisement ended by stating that *les dames seules* would not be admitted.

"Bother," exclaimed Miss Ducasne, as she and Mildred stopped to read the large printed placard, "what are we to do? We ought to see this fête,

for it will be characteristic of this part of the country. I vote that we both dress as men and go."

"I would not for the world," said Mildred, shortly.

"Why not? it would be no harm, only a frolic. I am often taken for a man, as you well know, and you, with your short hair, would pass at night with very little disguise."

"You need not talk about it," said Mildred, "for I will not. I owe it not only to myself, but to the association I am connected with, to do nothing rash or foolish. Every person who goes in to support a public cause, especially such a cause as ours, is bound to act in such a way as shall bring no discredit on her party."

Miss Ducasne made her a low bow with mock respect. "Admirable woman! you shall not be tempted."

Mildred herself regretted not seeing the fête, but as they had no acquaintances, she did not know how it could be helped.

Late in the evening she was alone in their little salon. The summer twilight had faded, and the dusk was only partially relieved by the rising moon, and the reflection from the lamps in the streets. The door opened, and she could just discern a gentlemanly figure who, hat in hand, advanced into the room. Mildred rose from the sofa, and was about to inquire whether

he had not mistaken the apartment, when the intruder said, "I come to request the honour of escorting Miss Randall to the fête to-night."

The voice solved the mystery. Miss Ducasne clapped her hands triumphantly.

"Quite nearly enough taken in to show that my disguise will do. Am I not capital? You can have no objection to going with me."

The disguise, to be a disguise, was a very modest one. A great-coat that almost reached to her heels. Mildred hesitated, laughed, and —pardon her, reader—said she would go.

At ten o'clock, they sallied forth, a lady attended by a gentleman. No sooner were they fairly launched in the street than Mildred, at all events, felt inclined to turn back. It was one thing to be deceived by a disguise in a darkened room, and another to trust to its efficiency in the full glare of gaslight. Her anxiety, however, seemed unfounded, and they mutually gained confidence as they found that their appearance excited no curious glances.

At the entrance of the garden, Miss Ducasne coolly paid the couple of francs demanded for herself and her companion, and they passed on unchallenged.

The gardens presented a brilliant spectacle. The illuminations consisted of thousands of coloured lamps, some forming stars and globes,

others suspended from the trees, gleamed through the sombre foliage of the long alleys with picturesque effect. The company, as was to be expected, was very mixed, but owing to the excellent police arrangements, all was orderly and outwardly decorous.

Mildred and her companion, feeling by this time tolerably at ease, walked about and were much amused. An open space was devoted to dancing, and they paused to watch the spectacle. Within a few yards of where they stood was a lady fantastically dressed, who wore a great quantity of orange-coloured hair. She was leaning on the arm of a gentleman, of whom it need merely be said that his appearance was suitable to her own.

Miss Ducasne whispered, "Do you know who that is?"

"It is evident I should say what she is," answered Mildred.

"No, no, don't be uncharitable. That is Rosaline Harvey."

"Oh!" exclaimed Mildred, "I confess I have had a curiosity to see her."

"Why, what do you know about her?"

"Rather too much," answered Mildred, significantly. At the same moment she was disconcerted to observe that Miss Harvey's attention was attracted by them. Miss Ducasne looked

uneasy for an instant, under the scrutiny of which she was especially the object, then smiled and nodded.

"You know her?" asked Mildred, in surprise.

"A little; she is great fun. Many people visit her. Some, of course—strait-laced people—would as soon touch pitch; but you and I have got over our prejudices."

"Speak for yourself," said Mildred, bluntly; "I am afraid that I retain a few, and one certainly is against having anything to do with Miss Rosaline Harvey."

That distinguished authoress, however, seemed disposed to have something to do with them. On meeting Miss Ducasne's glance of recognition she whispered a remark to her companion, and followed by him, crossed to where they stood.

While Miss Ducasne and her questionable friend spoke together in tolerably familiar tones, the gentleman asked Mildred to dance. She refused bluntly. Next moment it struck her that she had no right to resent the liberty, as, under the circumstances, he might naturally suppose ceremony to be uncalled for. She turned to Miss Ducasne, and taking hold of her arm, said as she drew her away—

"We must come home now. I have had enough of these gardens."

CHAPTER XXXII.

RESCUED.

MILDRED woke the following morning with a feeling which most of us probably know by experience of something disagreeable having happened. As her ideas cleared up, this sensation resolved itself into a conviction that she had committed a great mistake. The affair of the previous evening had ended better than could reasonably have been expected, and she questioned whether she had not been over hasty in making her intimacy with Miss Ducasne. Not that Mildred was inclined to throw undue blame on her companion, she had been drawn into nothing against her own will, but she now saw that they had gone together too far, and she determined to take warning in time. She would let curiosity lead her into no more doubtful scenes, and if Gabrielle would not consent to be equally prudent, why, they must separate.

This resolution was brought to the test sooner than she expected.

The arrangement they had instituted in their little ménage was that each had café au lait in her own room at an early hour, and between eleven and twelve they met in the salon and

settled their plan for the day. When Miss Ducasne made her appearance this morning, it was evident that she was disturbed by none of the self-reproaches that tormented the companion of her escapade. Her remark upon it was, "Well, I think we had great fun last night;" and walking to the window, "To-day I shall go and rout out Rosaline Harvey."

"You are joking," exclaimed Mildred; "you cannot really mean that you will call upon her."

"Why not? I consider it a lucky chance that we have come across her. We three will form a triangle, and have no end of fun together."

"I certainly will be one in no such triangle," protested Mildred, energetically. "You have been so long out of England that you do not know how she is spoken of."

"Pooh! do you suppose I don't know how she went on with Henry Herne, and all the rest of it? They say, by-the-way, that she has fleeced him pretty well, and serve him right. But one half such stories I don't believe, and the other half I don't mind. She is a very clever authoress; no, not very clever, either, her books are trash. She has very little originality, and a most slovenly style. If there is a thing I hate in a book it is bad English. Still her novels do sell. They are to be had in

the Tauchnitz edition, and in French, German, and even Russian, so she has all the prestige of talent. You know, Miss Randall, there is no use being over particular. I am sure I thought you were the last person to be hard on a woman."

"I am the last person to be hard on a woman," said Mildred; "I have no sympathy whatever with the Pharisees of society, who have one code of morality for a man, and another for a woman. Their conduct is very un-Christ-like, to begin with. 'Let him who is without sin among you cast the first stone at her,' was His verdict; 'Neither do I condemn thee; go, and sin no more.' But all that," added Mildred, checking her own warmth, for the subject was one on which she had strong opinions, "has nothing to do with Rosaline Harvey. She is simply a bold, unprincipled woman, who would grievously compromise any one who was seen in her company. I knew poor Mrs. Herne, whose life she made miserable, and I can assure you there is good foundation for all that is said against her."

Miss Ducasne had described herself truly in saying that she could keep her temper intact even when opposed. She did not now get angry, but she tried to carry her point by dint of pertinacity and ridicule.

She laughed at Mildred's scruples; told her that she wanted shaking up; that she was the victim of narrow prejudices; that she was slow——

At this point Mildred burst into a fit of laughter.

"What is the joke?" asked Miss Ducasne.

"Why, all my life I have been accused by many people of being fast; now you tell me I am slow. Well, there is no hope of pleasing everybody, so I shall act as my own judgment tells me is best. If you choose to make an alliance with Miss Harvey we must separate, so elect between her and me."

Miss Ducasne whistled and moved away, but she offered no concession, and soon afterwards put on her hat and went out.

She had not been gone long when the post came, and a letter was brought to Mildred from Miss Warburton.

Althea had no time for writing letters of mere friendship. She wrote when she had something to say, and in a few lines dashed off in her bold hand, said more than many people contrive to say in half a dozen pages. The present letter gave no private or general news, it was wholly on business with the exception of the last sentence, which ran thus—

"I hear your proceedings canvassed more than

I like. Remember what you owe not only to yourself, but to us all. There are many queer people, and you may be compromised before you know where you are."

Mildred's first feeling on reading this letter was of thankfulness that she had already taken a resolution to part from her present company. But she dwelt uneasily on the thought that disadvantageous reports had got to England concerning her. Whatever they might be, she felt sure Miss Warburton would stand her friend.

"Althea is a good woman, and a true friend," she said to herself, "how faithfully she warns me," and Mildred began to wish that she were back in London, and at work again.

Altogether she felt rather upset by this letter, which filled her with vague misgivings, and brought the discontent with which she reviewed her own past conduct to a climax. She was sitting with the letter in her lap, and a face of care and anxiety, when Miss Ducasne re-entered bringing with her an odour of tobacco. Mildred was too pre-occupied to speak or even to raise her eyes. Gabrielle walked up to her, and regarded her for several seconds in silence, then asked—

"What is the matter? You look very much out of sorts. Have you a headache?"

Mildred shook her head.

"You are tired from having walked so late last night. You want a screw. What will you have? Some brandy and soda, or absinthe?"

"You know I never touch such things," said Mildred, impatiently. "There is nothing the matter with me."

"Don't try to impose on me. If you are not ill, there is something in that letter that has annoyed you. Let me read it."

She made a snatch at the letter, which Mildred held back. Gabrielle got possession of it, however, and ran her eye unceremoniously over the contents. "'Bill come on for second reading—support in the House'—bother! I am not going to read all that. What a bad hand she writes, I am sorry for the printer who has to decipher her copy. The gist of a woman's letter is in the postscript. I shall look at the end. Oh, here's what you don't relish! I understand now!"

Mildred looked flushed and angry. "I consider that you have taken an unjustifiable liberty in meddling with a letter that does not belong to you. But since you have read it, what do you suppose she alludes to? Who can have been talking of me?"

Miss Ducasne shrugged her shoulders.

"How can I tell; more people know Tom fool than Tom fool knows."

"But I have done nothing that is wrong," said Mildred, with irritation. "The affair of last night had not taken place when this was written. Some people, I suppose, would say we had no business in the gaming-room at Wiesbaden. But I am sure we did no harm."

Miss Ducasne had returned to the perusal of the letter.

"I suppose," said she, with a laugh, "that I am one of the queer people whom you are warned against."

"I don't know about you," answered Mildred, "but Rosaline Harvey certainly is. My plans are made up. This letter confirms me in my previous decision. I leave for Paris to-morrow, and from thence, in a day or two, shall go on to England."

Miss Ducasne did not remonstrate. She would not give the only promise that might possibly have altered Mildred's resolution. Their parting, accordingly, was rather cold, but when the cab was at the door to take Mildred to the station, Miss Ducasne said, "You see our friendship has not stood the test of our trying to live together."

Mildred arrived in Paris, where she took up

her quarters at an hotel of which she had already had good experience.

The following day, in the course of her morning peregrinations, she found herself in the Louvre. As she lounged through the galleries she observed approaching a lady, very handsomely dressed, alone like herself, and who was leisurely surveying the pictures through an eyeglass.

Mildred's reason for observing her was, that, in spite of having an air of greater fashion, she bore so strong a resemblance to her eldest sister that, but for the extreme unlikelihood of such an encounter under the circumstances, she would have thought it was Isabella Randall. To her great surprise, on a nearer approach, she perceived that it was no other.

They stopped simultaneously, and Mildred exclaimed,

"You, Isabella! who would have thought of meeting you here?"

"I came over to Paris to choose spring fashions," was the reply, "and thought I might as well combine business and pleasure. So I came in here to see the pictures."

"Quite right," said Mildred, cordially; and secretly she thought that her eldest sister must be greatly changed since she ventured to take her pleasure in this independent fashion.

But Miss Randall did look a good deal altered. She looked brighter, more self-possessed, and her dress, though quiet, was most elegant and becoming.

"You are looking uncommonly well," said Mildred, speaking her thoughts aloud; "and how you are got up! You will be ashamed to be seen with me in my travelling costume."

"Not likely," answered Miss Randall, putting her arm through Mildred's; "you know I must dress well to advertise our establishment."

"Oh, I see," said Mildred, laughingly; "well, how are you and Georgina getting on?" she asked, drawing her sister into a quiet room.

"Splendidly; you know we have set up in business for ourselves."

"I do not know much," said Mildred; "tell me all about it."

"Well, you must know that I made a hit. I invented a bonnet. Don't laugh, Mildred; it must seem very trivial to you."

"Not at all," exclaimed Mildred; "business is made up of details. Think of the fortunes that have been realized by patents for very small things."

"I am so pleased you take this view. Well, the style of my bonnet took immensely; no end of grand customers came to the Miss Lébee's and ordered bonnets similar to Lady So and So's.

At last it struck Georgina that the Miss Lébees were profiting by my talent—don't think me vain, Mildred—while we were not reaping any benefit, so we told them that we must renew our arrangement on a different footing; and, as they refused to recognize our claims (they did not behave well or liberally), Georgina and I left them, and set up for ourselves. Had you been within reach, Mildred, we would have asked your advice, but as it was we were obliged to act to the best of our own judgment."

"And a great deal better that you did so," answered Mildred. "Your judgment seems to have been very sound. And you are getting plenty of custom?"

"Yes, we have got already a very excellent connexion. There is one thing—I don't know what you will say," and Miss Randall hesitated, as if half ashamed of some confession she was about to make. "You know a French name goes a long way, so I call myself Madame Isabelle. I hope you don't think it wrong?"

Mildred laughed heartily, though it might be observed that she did not commit herself by an opinion.

"And so Madame Isabelle, I am delighted to hear you are doing so well."

"And we owe everything to you," said Miss Randall, warmly. "But for you we never should.

have had courage to set at nought the opinion of the world. We are so happy. Our business is such an interest to us. And after all what was the position that we gave up? I am sure I wish I could persuade all poor ladies to follow our example, and take to professions of some sort."

Mildred remained in Paris a few days longer than she had intended, for the sake of returning with her sister. The day before she was to leave a waiter in the hotel brought her a message that a gentleman wished to see her.

"Show him up," said Mildred, and in another moment Miss Ducasne ran laughing into Mildred's arms.

"That idiot of a garçon," said she, "I'll wager he said un monsieur. Well, you will think I am like a bad shilling, always turning up; but I did not enjoy the way we parted, so I came after you, and here I am."

"And your friend, Miss Rosaline Harvey, is she with you?" asked Mildred, with involuntary sarcasm.

"Don't speak of her," exclaimed Miss Ducasne. "Oh Mildred, I knew at the time when I was so obstinate, that you were worth twenty Miss Harveys, but I did not really know her. I assure you that I am a sadder and a wiser woman."

Miss Ducasne seemed to be reluctant to go into particulars, but it was evident that something had occurred which had shocked her very much, and which had completely dissipated her hallucination in favour of Miss Harvey.

Mildred pressed for no confidence that was not given spontaneously, but she believed that the occasion was likely to be a turning point for good in Gabrielle's life, and she helped her to profit by it.

In the course of the evening, as they sat together in a window, looking out into the boulevard, Miss Ducasne said, "I am getting tired of my Bohemian life, and if I saw my way to anything better, I would give it up. Since the death of my parents, four years ago, I have had no settled home. At first I liked it immensely. I enjoyed the constant variety of new places and new faces, and having nothing to think about but the amusement of the hour, but this sort of thing palls on one, after a time. Often, when I am rushing from one place to another, with no earthly object, I say to myself, is this all I was sent into the world for?"

"Of course it was not," said Mildred; "we are all sent into the world to do good in our generation."

"Ah, but how? There is the difficulty. You are more fortunate than you, perhaps, are aware,

Miss Mildred Randall, in having your life-work cut out for you as it is."

"I cut out my own life-work," remarked Mildred, "I did not wait for it to be cut out for me. I might have waited long enough."

"If I had been a man," pursued Miss Ducasne, "I should have been brought up to a profession, as a matter of course, and I would have been a better person than I am. When one has no lawful outlet for one's energy, it is very difficult not to get into mischief. I might have married more than once, had I pleased, as I suppose most single women might, but I did not feel it was my vocation to 'suckle fools and chronicle small beer.' Yet, people seem to consider that women are bound to marry or do nothing."

"That may reasonably be the complaint of a great many women," observed Mildred; "there are ladies—hundreds—who waste their lives over fancy work, and novel-reading, because they have no chance to do anything better. But that is not your case. You can write, you can sketch, and you have found a market for your talents."

"But how do I write?" said Miss Ducasne, "only spasmodically, and to make my articles sell, I am obliged to put in many things I don't really think or approve."

"That excuse is worthy of Rosaline Harvey," exclaimed Mildred; "no wonder the taste of the

day is low, when authors, who do know better, pander to it in that way. I am thankful to say that I never wrote, or spoke in public one word that I do not really think and feel."

"Yes, yes, that is all very fine, but I must satisfy editors, or be idle. It is not for the sake of the pay alone that I write, but for the interest of the occupation."

"But why not exert yourself to do some good? There is a great movement engaging the attention of thoughtful women all over Europe, and women are wanted to help it forward. Gabrielle," added Mildred, "come with me to England to-morrow; I can give you a shakedown for a time, and I undertake to find you a field of work, and to introduce you to better friends than Rosaline Harvey."

Her tone was earnest and persuasive, Miss Ducasne looked touched.

"Mildred, my good angel," said she, "I have been very nearly over the brink—I will tell you all about it some day—and you have saved me."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

M.P. FOR SHADDON.

THE party, consisting of Mildred, Miss Randall, and Miss Ducasne, landed in England, and took

the train from Folkstone to London. Their route lay past Shaddon, which place had just had the excitement of an election, as the placards which still remained upon the walls bore evidence. "Vote for Hotham, and Progress."

How a single word will turn the current of our ideas. Mildred's thoughts had been pretty equally divided between the office she was so soon to see again, and the women's college. At the sight of that familiar name, office and college alike seemed to vanish; not that she felt particularly excited about the election, which probably concerned some distant connection of the Hotham family, but her thoughts, by a process quicker than that of the electric telegraph, shot across fifteen thousand miles of ocean, to the Antipodes.

As the train stopped at the station, the following notice caught her eye: "Mr. Francis Hotham will meet his friends and supporters this evening," &c.

The conjunction of names was singular. Mildred did not think that her Frank Hotham had returned from Australia, and was standing for an English borough. Nevertheless, she beckoned to a boy who was selling newspapers on the platform, and bought a local journal. The election, naturally, supplied material for the leading article, of which she impatiently skimmed the

cream. "The more Liberal party in Shaddon have gained a triumph on which they have reason to congratulate themselves. Mr. Francis Hotham has already proved his aptitude for political life—member of the Legislative Assembly of Australia—no member listened to with greater interest and attention," &c., &c.

Mildred's face flushed with feelings of a mingled nature. The whole thing was a surprise to her. She was not even aware that he had taken any part in colonial politics; he had been wont to say that he found quite enough to do in the management of his own large station. She might have been still more surprised had she known that she was the indirect cause of his entering into public life.

Frank Hotham had returned to Australia after his engagement was broken off, depressed and unhappy. He returned thither, because he was disgusted with England, but he no longer felt the same ambition to increase his fortune. What did it signify, he said to himself, not, perhaps, in so many words, whether or not he made money? He had enough, and more than enough for his bachelor establishment, and he never would have any other to provide for. For after all that had come and gone between him and Mildred, he felt he would never court any other woman. Yet, deeply as he felt his disappoint-

ment, Frank was not a man to waste his life in inaction because he could not shape it precisely after his own fancy.

> "Out on the coward heart that e'er betrayed
> The noon of manhood to the myrtle shade."

To cure himself of love, he took to politics. He stood for the district in which his run was situated, and was elected after a fierce contest. That experience was like the taste of blood. He discovered that the political arena was that in which he liked to work, and we may add, in which he was qualified to shine. He was a good speaker, and from the day he took his seat in the Legislative Assembly, he became one of the most hard-working and distinguished members. He interested himself in every important question that concerned the welfare of the colony, and advocated his views with an ability, a moderation, and an independence of popular applause, which caused him to take very high ground.

Frank Hotham was one of those men whose character and capabilities develop gradually. He was a very superior man to what he had promised to be as a boy, when his father complained that he laughed too much to have much in him. When called upon to act in responsible situations, he acquitted himself well; and now that

his new functions required him to think out many questions which he had not hitherto specially considered, his views, both political and social, gained much in breadth and soundness. In the midst of this active life, while gaining golden opinions from all those whose approbation was worth having, he felt a sudden desire to see again the old country. Almost at the same time, the value of stations in the district, owing to one or two causes, rose immensely. Frank caught the right moment, sold his run and stock to great advantage, and took his passage to England, a man of large fortune.

His parents, of course, were delighted to see him. They were very proud of him, as parents are apt to be of a son who distinguishes himself in any way. Mrs. Hotham had a book full of reports of his speeches, and extracts from newspaper articles in his praise. But Frank, himself, when the first pleasure of being at home and the novelty of his idle life had subsided, was not particularly happy. He had nothing to do. Riding with hounds, shooting, lounging at London clubs, and paying visits to country houses—he received plenty of attention—was all very well, but he had led too busy a life to be satisfied, at thirty-three, to look forward to doing nothing else, and he began almost to regret having wound up his affairs in Australia.

He consulted his father as to the best investment for his money.

"My advice," said his father, "is that you buy a landed estate. No doubt, it will not give you high interest for your money, but you can afford to diminish your income; and were you to invest a good round sum in land, it would give you a position that nothing else gives."

Frank saw the advantages of the suggestion.

"Now," continued Hotham, senior, "there is that fine estate Westerton in the market. Where will you find a nicer place? Delightful part of the county, fine wood, gardens, greenhouses, stabling all complete. Capital house."

"Too big," said Frank; "what would a solitary bachelor do with a beautiful place like that?"

"Pooh!" said his father, "you do not intend to wear the willow all your life. There are lots of nice girls, and you are not such a disagreeable fellow."

Which hint Frank let pass. The idea, however, of becoming a landed proprietor in the county, where his family were already known and respected, commended itself to him, and he entered into treaty for the said estate. Though Mr. Hotham was not of a county family, he had for long been received in county society. His son, therefore, did not take his place in the neighbourhood as a stranger. And when shortly

after he had concluded the purchase, a vacancy happened to occur in the representation of Shaddon, he was invited to come forward, and contest the seat in the Liberal interest. The proposal was too consonant to his own tastes for him to require much solicitation; he offered himself as a Conservative-Liberal, and his success in the contest we already know.

But it is a woman's biography we undertook to write, not that of a man.

The travellers separated at Victoria Station. Miss Randall went off in a cab to the millinery establishment, to gladden the eyes of Georgina with the sight of Paris fashions, which were to be changed into gold; while the others proceeded together in another direction.

Mildred's home looked bright and cheerful to receive her. The dinner-table was ready laid for two, with snowy linen and shining silver. Her housekeeper, who had been with her four years, looked pleased to see her, and her dog rushed to meet her with a more demonstrative though not sincerer welcome.

"The intelligence of the beast, ma'am!" remarked Hannah; "all the twelve months you have been away he has been very contented with me, but this evening, when he saw me laying the table, the first time after so long a while, he sat down and watched the door; whenever a cab

passed he pricked up his ears, and when the bell rang, he ran out, I could not have held him back."

"Dear old fellow," said Mildred, lavishing caresses upon him, "how anybody can object to be related to the animals I can't think! I wish we were all as good as you, my Carlo! Well, Gabrielle, it is very pleasant to return home, and find everything right. Come upstairs, and I will show you your room."

A heap of letters and papers were awaiting Mildred. Among the miscellaneous collection was a printed notice, a week old, of a Women's Suffrage meeting to be held that very evening. She was not at all fatigued by her journey, so at about seven o'clock she sent for a cab, and she and Miss Ducasne drove to St. —— Hall.

They had something more to do, as they found, than to walk in and take their seats, even though provided with platform tickets. It was half an hour before the time, yet a string of vehicles stopped the way, and the doors were besieged by a crowd, which three or four policemen were scarcely sufficient to keep in order. The instant the doors opened, there was a rush, and the hall filled to overflowing.

Mildred could hardly believe that all this demonstration was for a Reform Bill which was ostensibly to benefit women only; and she felt how great progress the question must have made

within the last twelve months. She felt this still more strongly when she had leisure to look round. There were so many new faces ; so many lady speakers ; evidently, so many new adherents to the cause. One face she missed, which she would like to have seen. But the claims on Miss Warburton, as principal of the Randall College, were not compatible with her assisting at political meetings, except on rare occasions, and she gave herself conscientiously to the duties she had undertaken. A compliment, however, was paid to her in her absence, and her place was well, if not fully, filled by others ; for the question had now attained that degree of importance in public esteem, that there was scarcely a woman distinguished for ability in England, whose name was not connected more or less prominently with the cause.

Mildred succeeded, with difficulty, in gaining admittance by a side door on to the platform, followed by Miss Ducasne, who, laughing silently, elbowed her way, highly amused with her first experience of England. They took back seats, the first they found vacant, and there it was Mildred's intention to sit passive during the meeting.

They amused themselves watching the stream of arrivals, and Mildred pointed out to her companion various notabilities.

"Do you see those fair handsome girls? The youngest has come out as a crack speaker. They could command almost anything they chose in the matrimonial line, for they have beauty, youth, and heaps of money, but they put nothing in competition with this Cause. That lady, in the body of the hall, with the green feather in her hat, does not work with any Association, but she accomplishes an immense deal single-handed. She affects eccentricity of dress, something like you, Gabrielle."

"I am going to turn over a new leaf, in respect of dress," remarked Miss Ducasne; "since you are so kind to me, the least I can do is to please you in return."

Mildred smiled. "The lady who is just now crossing in front of the platform," said she, "pioneered the way for women into the medical profession."

"A good-looking woman," was Miss Ducasne's comment. "Well got up, too."

"Yes, I am told that she dresses well on principle, thinks it tells. The short woman behind her is an American M.D. She has a good practice, too, I believe."

"Who is that handsome, distinguished-looking woman who bowed to you just now?" asked Miss Ducasne.

"Mrs.——" (the buzz in the hall prevented the

name being heard). "Yes, she is, as you say, both handsome and distinguished looking, good style in every way, an effective speaker, too. The gentleman beside her is her husband. He has written some very good pamphlets on the question."

Miss Ducasne, with her glass in her eye, was looking round the hall.

"It is all very interesting," said she, "and these ladies, I am sure, do credit to the cause. But where are all the real strong-minded women such as 'Punch' draws? Women that look like men, and dress horribly. I don't see any here."

"Because they don't exist," replied Mildred, laughing.

At that moment a lady came up to her, with whom she had a very slight personal acquaintance —one of the committee who had arranged the meeting.

"It won't do for you to sit here," said she; "we don't put lady speakers in the background. You must come to the front, and address the meeting."

Mildred was not unwilling to comply; her mind was full of thoughts and feelings which called for expression; so, in the course of the evening, she made an extemporary and very effective speech, which was received with great applause.

The chairman gave a list of places which had lately sent petitions to Parliament for the "removal of women's political disabilities."

Mildred observed that one had been presented from Shaddon of a thousand names. This, more than even the size of the present meeting, marked to her the real advance of the movement. She remembered the failure of the first attempt to obtain signatures from the inhabitants of Shaddon; now it had its working committee of which the Rev. Mr. Green was the honorary secretary, and Mr. Hotham treasurer, and sent up a petition signed by the best names in the place.

So Mildred might be said to be again in harness, and her twelve months' continental wanderings were a thing of the past.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

AT LAST.

EARLY next morning Mildred was at her office, where she spent the whole day, going carefully over the books, and had the satisfaction of receiving from Mr. Walsh a most flourishing

report of the business. This was an auspicious beginning, and when she left the office at five o'clock, to keep an appointment with Miss Ducasne, she felt in extremely good spirits. As she walked along a quiet street at the west end, she suddenly remembered that that very day seven years she had come to London as an adventurer. How full of experience those seven years had been! Moreover this day was her thirtieth birthday.

The corner of thirty is one which few women like to turn; and not unnaturally in the case of women to whom life offers no excitement, no pleasure but such as are dependent on youth and looks—they may well grudge the passing away of either. Let the poor things paint and dye their hair with poisonous liquids, and affect juvenility in dress and manner! To blame them is cruel and unjust. Such acts are but the natural outgrowth of ordinary female education and aims.

But so far was Mildred from endorsing the opinion that the noon of life offers a woman little—she was far happier now than she had been at twenty, and she smiled as she contrasted her own joyous feelings with what she knew must be those of many women on their thirtieth birthday. Her powers of mind and body were in their zenith, and she was reaping the fruits

of many of the struggling efforts of her early youth. There was scarcely a circumstance in her lot, she said to herself, that she would alter if she could. The past was pleasant to look back upon; the present was crowded with interests, and the future lay bright before her.

The cheerfulness of her feelings was reflected in her face and her step, which was even more light and springy than usual. Suddenly, turning the corner of Baker Street into Portman Square, she found herself face to face with Frank Hotham!

They stopped simultaneously, but words of recognition did not come readily to either. His greeting consisted of a silent pressure of the hand, which forced her rings a quarter of an inch into her fingers. He turned and walked beside her. Mildred congratulated him on his recent victory, adding—

"I was so surprised; I did not even know you had returned to England."

He answered slightly, then asked, "What is your news?"

"I don't know if there is much news to-day," she replied, "I have had no time to look at the papers."

"I did not refer to the affairs of the state," observed Frank, a little impatiently. "What have you been about?"

"I have been roaming about on the Continent, for a whole year. I have been in France, Germany, Italy, and Switzerland."

"So I heard."

"And now I must work doubly hard to make up for such a long holiday. Poor Mr. Cook has been dead some time, and I took his business."

"So I am aware."

"Your question of what I have been doing was almost superfluous," remarked Mildred, with a smile; "you seem to be as well acquainted with my proceedings as I am myself. Perhaps you are also aware that I have entered into partnership with Mr. Walsh?"

"Oh, yes, I heard of that partnership. Preliminary, I conclude, to another of a more interesting nature."

Mildred turned quickly round. "I beg you will conclude nothing of the kind," she said, curtly. "Our partnership is entirely a commercial one."

"Is it so?" said Frank, dryly. "I have a notion that Mr. Walsh would confess to other views."

"I am sure I hope not," said Mildred, almost pettishly. "It would spoil a most advantageous arrangement. We work together capitally on our present footing, and we could work together no more if he took up 'other views.' But I

think you are mistaken. I give him credit for more sense."

She looked annoyed, but Frank smiled cheerfully.

"You consider, then," said he, "that it argues want of sense to entertain matrimonial views?"

"I don't say anything about that," replied Mildred, and her colour deepened.

A silence followed, which he was the first to break.

"So you will not give up speaking on platforms in favour of women's rights?"

"I cannot," answered Mildred, earnestly, and there was a world of thought and feeling in the simple negative; "I spoke last night."

"I know you did. You did not see me at your meeting."

"For good reason; because you were not there."

"I was there."

"You! at a woman's suffrage meeting."

"Yes, I saw it advertised, and thought I would go and hear what could be said on the subject."

"Well, and what did you think of it?" asked Mildred, hesitatingly.

"I thought," was the reply, "that I should be proud of hearing my wife speak as you did."

This unexpected answer had the effect of silencing Mildred. His allusion to Mr. Walsh

had been received indifferently, without so much as a change of colour. Now she averted her face, and a brilliant blush dyed her cheek.

"Mildred," said Frank, "if you can forget that I ever objected——"

"Take care—take care," she interrupted, turning her glowing face towards him, "or the member for Shaddon will be asked to take the chair some night at a Women's Suffrage meeting."

"You may ask the member for Shaddon to do what you please," he answered, "he is not likely to refuse."

* * * *

Five years had passed since Mrs. Herne left England. During this interval, letters had been received from her by both Mildred and Miss Warburton. Brave, even cheerful letters; for she had been successful in the land of her adoption, and had met with much kindness and many friends. By not uncongenial toil, she was able to provide a comfortable, if not a luxurious, home for her daughter, who was growing up at her side in health and beauty.

In one of these letters Mrs. Hill—for under this name she always wrote—made a reference, which touched Mildred, to the little grave of her son. She asked her friend to look at it

sometimes, and tell her if it had the appearance of being cared for.

Mildred immediately visited the spot, which she found very neatly kept, and she took with her a wreath of immortelles, which she hung upon the stone. She knew the mother would be gratified, though she did not anticipate how very much the simple act of kindness would be valued. Leonora wrote so gratefully that Mildred resolved to renew the wreath on each anniversary of the child's birth, and that of his death.

One day, as she drew near to the grave, holding in her hand the fresh wreath, she was surprised to observe a gentleman standing there. His back was towards her, and he appeared to be reading the inscription on the marble cross. Mildred paused, and was about to retreat when he suddenly turned, and they stood face to face.

Before she could move away he said, pointing to the faded crown on the stone—

"Now I know who places these souvenirs here."

Strange though it may seem, Mildred did not at once identify the speaker. The last words she had exchanged with Mr. Herne were during the stormy interview in her house. The last time she had seen him was in a court of justice,

when he had done his best to bring a criminal charge home to her. This man looked so aged in comparison, so worn, so changed in every way. She said, with hesitation—

"I speak to Mr. Herne?"

"You speak to a very unhappy man, Miss—Mrs. Hotham. Self-reproach is hard to bear."

In fact, the world had gone hard with Mr. Herne the last few years. His fortune had been considerably damaged by the extravagance of Miss Rosaline Harvey, who, when nothing more seemed likely to be got out of her admirer, had thrown him over in the most mortifying manner. He had lost his seat in Parliament, and "thereby hangs a tale."

It happened that, about a year after his separation from his wife, a general election took place, when some ladies, who strongly reprobated his conduct, resolved to make his seat "shaky," to quote their own words. With this object they got up an agitation, and proved that, if women are denied votes, they can, at any rate, influence an election. They were better than their word, for, by their meetings and speeches, they excited so strong a feeling against him in the constituency, that he was defeated, and his opponent returned by an immense majority.

At the time of this event taking place, Mildred had derived a very human enjoyment

from the taste of revenge, but the memory of the bitter strife between them vanished from her mind at this unexpected encounter. She felt sure, from the change in his appearance, that he had suffered, and she felt towards him as a generous mind ever will feel towards a fallen enemy.

Encouraged, apparently, by something in her manner, he said—

"Tell me about *her* and my child—are they well? for that you know where they are, I am certain."

Mildred's face grew harder. A look of cold reserve was her only answer.

"Stay," he exclaimed, "you misjudge me. Standing here, by my son's grave, you may surely trust me."

"I will trust you," answered Mildred, frankly, ever ready, though not weakly so, to believe the best of every one. "Here, by your son's grave, I confess that I do know where your wife and your remaining child are, and Leonora will be very happy when she hears of this meeting."

"Will you tell her anything in my favour?" he asked. "Then give her a message. Tell her that if she will return to me, I will do my best to atone for the miserable past."

Mildred bowed.

Mr. Herne stooped and gathered a small flower that grew on the turf.

"I think she will trust me on your representation," he observed; "but, in case she should be suspicious, put this into your letter, and tell her where it was gathered. It will be a pledge, which I know she will accept, of the integrity of my intentions."

Mildred felt that this was a singular interview—a strange passage to take place between her and Mr. Herne. But such passages do occur, because, in nearly every one of us, however worldly we may have grown, there remains an undercurrent of feeling which, from time to time, if but for a moment only, asserts the humanity within us.

Mildred undertook to act as mediator, and with the happy result, that Leonora consented to return with her daughter to England. On landing, she was met by her husband; and the last days of Mr. and Mrs. Herne were better than the first.

THE END.

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